STRATEGIC PLANNING FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN CONGREGATIONS

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ABSTRACT

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The context is First Mt. Olive Freewill Baptist Church in Baltimore, Maryland. The contextual problem derived from this research is the lack of strategic planning, resulting in declining membership within most churches. The hypothesis was that participation in a six-week training program on transformational leadership would better prepare, enable, and motivate selected members to identify and meet congregants' needs in order to facilitate an active process of strategic planning. This qualitative research project used several methods for data collection to analyze the outcomes of the intervention. Those methods included pre and post-surveys, personal journal entries, and group discussions.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am profoundly grateful for my life journey, which has brought me into contact with many remarkable individuals who have had a lasting impact on my personal and ministerial growth. First and foremost, I would like to acknowledge my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Also, my parents, Rev. James Hunt and Dr. Sheila Johnson Hunt. I distinctly remember their unwavering encouragement, which pushed my brother and me to strive for excellence regardless of the obstacles we faced. Their example of resilience and their achievements in higher education provided me with a powerful model to emulate.

I also want to express my heartfelt gratitude to my friends and family, who have supported me throughout this process. I am truly blessed to have a circle of people who celebrate victories with me and offer unwavering support during challenges. My sincere thanks also go to the members and leadership of the First Mount Olive Baptist Church. They entrusted a young preacher from Pittsburgh to lead the youth ministry during a transitional period in the church's history, shaping it into what it is today. In this environment, I learned how to navigate and facilitate ministry on a deeper level.

I am especially thankful for the Youth and Young Adult Council, which partnered with me during my tenure at the church. Through those meetings, events, and even our impromptu conversations in the parking lot, I experienced significant growth as a leader.

Thank you to Dr. William H. Curtis and Dr. Lance Watson. Their strive for academic excellence has pushed me to become the leader and thinker I am today. It was

hearing Dr. Curtis' sermons as a college student that transformed my thinking and perspective of God and ministry. To the "Fab 5" Watson/Curtis semester cohort, we have journeyed through every assignment together, and now we celebrate our graduation as a team. I am grateful for this group of brothers who have provided academic support, a shared vision, and camaraderie for life and ministry.

Finally, I want to acknowledge every person who has ever encouraged me after preaching a sermon, every student I have taught in Bible study, and every pastor who has offered me a word of affirmation. Your encouragement and support have been instrumental in shaping my ministry journey, and I honor each of you with heartfelt gratitude.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the countless individuals who have influenced, shaped, and enriched my life. Among them, three stand out as the primary inspirations for this project.

First, my wife, Dr. Tracy Hunt, has been a constant source of inspiration and support. Her dedication to helping others—whether through meaningful conversations or acts of kindness—reflects her deep compassion and commitment to making a difference. Watching her navigate the challenges of her doctoral program while working full-time, managing our family, and raising two children has been nothing short of extraordinary. Her perseverance and grace have left an indelible mark on me.

Second, I dedicate this work to my son, Bradley Hunt. On a fall day in October, my life changed forever when I became a father. Watching him grow and develop into the exceptional young man he is today has been one of the greatest joys of my life. I am eager to see the incredible things he will accomplish in adulthood.

Third, this dedication extends to my daughter, Taylor Hunt. She has been a radiant source of joy from the moment she entered this world. I deeply admire her quick wit, infectious laughter, and remarkable intelligence. I am excited to witness her continue to blossom into the extraordinary woman God has called her to be.

This work is also dedicated to the future lives I will touch through pastoral leadership and the ministry work to which I have been called. May this project reflect my commitment to uplifting others and fulfilling the purpose God has placed on my life.

INTRODUCTION

The saying, "If you fail to plan, you plan to fail," caught my attention right from childhood. However, when these were reflected on as an adult, especially from the date of commencing this current doctoral program, they convinced me that, indeed, planning heavily factors into the success of every organization or institution. To that effect are various companies and secular organizations I work or volunteer for outside the ministry. Growing up as a Pastor's Kid, I watched ministry grow, plateau, and decline. Later, after moving to a new city post-college and serving on church staff, I saw similar growth patterns, stagnation, and decline again. What was so evident to me was what was missing in most of these situations: strategic planning. This is often reduced to just coming up with a spiritual theme of the year without considering what the people in the congregation need or what contextual factors influence the living of their respective communities. From this understanding, this doctoral thesis presents its basis as it attempts to fill the gap regarding planning within the African American church context.

This Doctoral Project is rooted in the firm conviction that intentional strategic planning in cooperation with others is necessary for the African American Church to sustain itself and expand. The focus is on the ministry planning perspective that equipping and empowering others to serve and use their gifts is immensely critical. For a proper research outcome, the subject matter has been systematically divided into six chapters, which combine to allow an all-around understanding of this subject area.

Chapter One tells my spiritual story of growing up, faith development, higher education, and God's calling into the ministry. Additionally, it covers my professional growth, gifts, and passions. This chapter provides a connecting point whereby my context, the state of Maryland, and First Mt. Olive Baptist Church link to my focus on ministry. This chapter outlines how these gifts, passions, and contexts merge to help frame this ministry project.

The second chapter provides a purely biblical framework for understanding strategic planning. It focuses on Luke 14:28–33, forming parallels with the case of Jethro through exegetical analysis and word studies. The goal is to point out that evaluation/planning before execution is a biblical principle in ministry.

Chapter Three considers the life and ministry of Dr. John Malcus Ellison, one of the key personalities in African American theological education. It explores his foresight into developing the School of Theology at Virginia Union University for African American preachers, demonstrating the transforming power of strategic planning in ministry.

Chapter Four provides theological insights explored herein from a renewal theology perspective that examines the church from organizational and organismal vantage points. As such, it explains exactly what church renewal is, provides some historical overview, and discusses how renewal theology will likely transform the church to meet its contemporary and future needs.

Chapter Five combines strategic planning principles and transformational leadership theory in identifying how the latter has so far shaped organizations in a

framework that can support the African American Church to overcome its planning challenges and sustain itself.

The final chapter overviews the design, execution, and evaluation of the doctoral project. This covers professional collaborations, planning processes, and revisions. Data collection and analysis are also discussed. This chapter reflects on what was learned during the project and how this work can be replicated and improved in the future. This dissertation builds a foundation upon strategic planning to further ministry. It seeks to address the deficiency of intentional planning, which has drastically impeded progress within African American congregations. The project utilizes historical backgrounds and leadership principles as a framework from which new leadership development and sustainability across generations can be initiated. Ultimately, it is to equip African American churches to embrace strategic planning as a significant tool for effective ministry, with the confidence that their impact will continue to make a difference through whatever challenges come their way. Looking ahead, this research has implications beyond its immediate findings. Future studies can expand upon this work by exploring the specific challenges and opportunities faced by different church sizes, demographics, and geographical locations. Additionally, practical workshops, leadership training programs, and collaborative networks can be developed to provide church leaders with hands-on strategies for implementing effective planning processes.

In conclusion, the African American Church stands at a crossroads where intentional strategic planning must become a central component of ministry leadership. Without planning, sustainability is uncertain, and the impact of the church may diminish over time. However, with prayerful, informed, and strategic decision-making, the church

can continue to fulfill its mission with excellence and longevity. This doctoral project serves as a call to action, urging church leaders to embrace strategic planning as a necessary tool for ministry effectiveness. By doing so, the African American Church will not only preserve it's rich heritage but also position itself for continued growth and transformation in the years to come.

CHAPTER ONE

MINISTRY FOCUS

My whole life, I have been exposed to the devastation of not planning, that can result in a lack of sustainability and growth of the church. As a Pastor's Kid, I have been able to see from my upbringing what goes on behind the scenes within the ministry. I saw times of growth followed by stagnation and, finally, decline. Lacking at the time the vocabulary or even understanding of what was missing, I have since, through maturity and professional experiences outside of the church, found a common problem: there is no strategic planning.

That same pattern followed after college when our family relocated to a new city, and I was on staff at a church. I had seen such ministries start off with flying colors only to struggle afterward, the leadership overwhelmed by running the day-to-day operations, or the congregations quite unsure of which direction they were being directed. While literally there was no shortage of passion, faith, or, for that fact, good intent, what largely seemed missing could be described simply as a predicated plan laid down to ensure proper assessment of resources, congestion needs, and thus preparing for whatever comes next future-wise.

A lack of intentionality in planning often meant that opportunities were missed, challenges were not anticipated, and the church was merely reactive. I believe this contrast increased when I came to work outside of the church or with organizations in

which strategic planning was a heavy emphasis. Many of these have been organizations skilled in not only setting achievable goals but are also wise at strategically apportioning resources and keeping frequent reviews against the desired set targets. It did not take me long to realize that, indeed, these were the same principles that could be applied in the church context, where planning was a reflection of stewardship and faithfulness, as well as a practical necessity. These experiences convinced me that without planning, ministries fall, and the church cannot be relevant in the fast-changing world. This has been the basis for my passion for facilitating churches to embrace strategic planning for aligning vision, mobilizing resources, and serving effectively within the community. Strategic planning is not a replacement for faith; it is an expression of faith, a way to partner with God in building His kingdom with intentionality and purpose.

Geographic Context

The active congruent membership of First Mt. Olive Baptist Church constitutes a demographic profile that is no different from the surrounding community. The membership composition of the church mirrors 70% female and 30% male, while the average age is forty-five years. Educationally, 65% of the adults have been high school graduates who have had some college. The church trustees keep these. The characteristics are consistent with broader community trends. The educational attainment level in the community surrounding the church is very diverse: associate or bachelor's degree, some college or associate's degree, high school graduate or equivalent, and less than high school diploma. The gender distribution is somewhat even: 51.9% women and 49.1% men. There is a slight discrepancy in marital status between genders. Among singles in

the local community, males are more apt to be never married than females. The number of never married males is around 1,364, while the number of females who never married is 1,085. The estimation shows that out of 2022, there exist almost 5,000 married people at the 21090 area code, as well as over 1,000 married people who went through a divorce along their path. The zip code consists of 87% White, 14% African American, and 2.5 percent Latino.[1]

The neighborhood also has a considerable population of school-age children, with 613 in early elementary school, 639 in late elementary and middle school, and 350 in high school. Most residents live in family households, with 9,596 residing in family settings, further underlining the family-oriented nature of the community.[2]

The demographic and geographic elements of this area, in fact, show the relevance and probable role of this church within that community. Health and income indicators in that neighborhood further point to its appropriateness as a fertile ground for community ministry and social involvement. These different factors provide proper insight into the opportunities present in strategic planning that aligns the church's mission with the realities and needs at the member and macro levels.

Ministry Context

First Mt. Olive Freewill Baptist Church was established in Baltimore, Maryland. It is an institution steeped in tradition for African Americans. Founded as part of an

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[1] U.S. Census Bureau, “2020 Census of Population and Housing, Baltimore, Maryland," https://www.unitedstateszipcodes.org/21090/.

[2] MissionInsite, "Demographic Data for ZIP Code 21090," MissionInsite, https://censusreporter.org/profiles/86000US21090-21090/.

organization concerned with the freedom of enslaved people, this church has been affected by the events that shaped not only the course of Americans but also Baltimore's history, the civil rights era. The church has taken proper anchoring by being able both spiritually and socially to face changed requirements within such change. The church normally lacks good and strategic direction plans, which have meant periods of challenge in the sustainability and growth of said faith community. The church recently underwent major transitioning-exacerbated notably by fire losses in the unfortunate year 2007, followed by the lifeblood of daily challenge presented by COVID-19 as well, adding to difficult physical distancing.

The 2007 fire that razed the church building proved to be a defining moment. Through this second migration, First Mt. Olive conducted its worship services from Jewish synagogues in Northwest Baltimore, reflecting a wonderful example of interfaith support for this congregation. The church went through a 'transition period' when its infrastructure emerged as fragile; the active ministries were reduced to twenty-five due to the decrease in the facilitation of space to hold other meetings of different ministries. Ultimately, the building that the church reconstructed first to reinstate a lot of her Bible studies/ministry operations happened to be its administration building. These efforts notwithstanding, membership attrition within the congregation was such and resistance on the part of the community against the rebuilding of the church's facility in that area.

In a pivotal move, the church relocated to a former bank processing center in Linthicum, a suburban area near the Baltimore Washington Airport. The new location was quite different from the urban context in which the church had grown accustomed. Although the new property had more than 200 parking spaces on nine acres of ground,

accessibility by public transportation to and proximity to the mother community had been sacrificed in the new environment. It thus brought forth logistical shifts that produced a new normal, presenting significant challenges toward modifying outreach methodology and ministries.

Then there came the COVID-19 pandemic, an additional challenging reality for First Mt. Olive. Meager in their dependence on virtual infrastructure at first, the church soon began streaming its services, keeping an average of 450 to 800 people viewing the service on a weekly basis. Bishop Brown proved instrumental during that period, although he struggled in public with COVID and then prostate cancer, so he empowered this Church Council that was newly created to step in and pick up the reins of responsibility. However, this move exposed the gaps in communication and decision-making points and, in a more positive light, underlined the dire need for leadership collaboratively exercised. This season, since the pandemic, the church has attempted to re-engage its membership and volunteers by reinforcing the discrepancy between ministry needs and congregational participation. Partnerships like the one it developed with a counseling service and selective fundraising for selected needs have been added. Today, it only has half the volunteer base that it had built up pre-pandemic, and this reflects its struggle today to regain a sense of community. First Mt. Olive's story is unique in the importance of strategic planning.

For 37 years under its current pastor, the church’s ministry leadership structure has remained largely unchanged. Out of the 40 ministries within the church, only two report directly to the Director of Ministries of Excellence, who then reports to the senior pastor. This hierarchical structure has led to significant challenges, particularly in the

approval process, causing delays in decision-making. Over time, impactful ministries have suffered from decreased engagement and enthusiasm due to inefficiencies in obtaining timely approvals necessary for sustaining their activities.

Historically, during the 1990s and early 2000s, when the church was larger in membership, its ministries thrived under a more decentralized leadership model. At that time, there were two to three tiers of leadership responsible for approvals and budget disbursements. However, after a fire damaged the church, the decision-making structure was drastically altered, consolidating all executive authority into the hands of the senior pastor.

This shift placed an increasing burden on the senior pastor, who became solely responsible for all ministry and operational decisions. In the early 1990s, the church staff included a secretary, a church administrator, a youth pastor, and an assistant to the pastor. This organizational model allowed the senior pastor to focus on pastoral duties such as home and hospital visits, as well as vision-casting for the congregation. However, after the fire, when the church lost its building and faced financial constraints, its operational structure changed once again.

Following the purchase of a new building, a more balanced administrative model was briefly reinstated, featuring an administrative leader who supported all church operations. However, this structure did not last long. After the COVID-19 pandemic, the leadership model reverted to one where the senior pastor assumed sole authority over all executive, spiritual, and operational decisions. This centralized structure is neither

sustainable nor conducive to church growth. Concentrating all decision-making power in a single role is unhealthy for any organization, including a church. A balanced distribution of power and influence is crucial for long-term stability and effectiveness.

The post-COVID-19 period has placed significant strain on both the senior pastor's health and the overall functionality of the ministries. Since the onset of the pandemic, ministry activities have decreased by over 60%. Key ministries, including men's, women's, and children's ministries, have reduced their activities to once per quarter, compared to their previous frequency of nearly once a month. Other ministries have ceased holding consistent events, limiting opportunities for member engagement and diminishing the church's ability to fulfill its vision.

Prior to COVID-19, the church was actively involved in outreach efforts such as food and clothing drives and holiday giveaways. Although the community's demographics changed after the fire, most of these outreach initiatives remained the same. However, in the post-pandemic period, outreach efforts have been further reduced, with the church now primarily focusing on monthly food giveaways and maintaining a clothing closet for community members. These initiatives continue to be the church's primary means of external engagement.

Despite changes in location and organizational structure, First Mount Olive has remained consistent in its worship style. Initially a Baptist church, it has evolved into a Pentecostal-Baptist congregation, where the movement of the Holy Spirit remains central to every worship experience. Regardless of when individuals have attended services—whether in past decades or today—they continue to encounter a spiritually engaging

atmosphere. While this worship style may feel unfamiliar to some, it remains a key factor in fostering engagement among members.

One critical area that requires further development is online engagement. Although the church began streaming services a year before the COVID-19 pandemic, it has not yet cultivated a strong sense of online community comparable to its in-person experience. Historically, church leadership has prioritized in-person worship, resulting in minimal efforts to establish a meaningful and interactive virtual environment for online congregants. Bridging this gap is essential for the church's continued growth and accessibility in an increasingly digital world.

The Church should be constantly planning with a purpose: to continue aligning the mission with the changed needs of the congregation and community brought about by demographics, culture, and logistics. First Mt. Olive can uniquely return to its original status as a spiritual and social pillar through lessons from its past, securing it for future generations.

Ministry Journey

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That same pattern followed after college when our family relocated to a new city, and I was on staff at a church. I had seen such ministries start off with flying colors only to struggle afterward, the leadership overwhelmed by running the day-to-day operations, or the congregations quite unsure of which direction they were being directed. While literally there was no shortage of passion, faith, or, for that fact, good intent, what largely seemed missing could be described simply as a predicated plan laid down to ensure proper assessment of resources, congestion needs, and thus preparing for whatever comes next future-wise.

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I recall specifically, dating back to age five, when I played the drums at my dad's church. Those early years, ages five through twelve, played a significant role in instilling in me my passion, my love, and my deep regard for ministry. Participating in church life was not a matter of preference but a part of life. I did not stop at singing in church—I participated in many aspects of church life, including cleaning the bathrooms, preparing post-service meals, and accompanying the trustees to the bank for financial transactions. All these experiences helped me gain a comprehensive understanding of the inner workings of ministry.

One of the most significant aspects of my early church life was the preparation for annual events such as the Christmas play, which required two months of rehearsals. I also participated in youth ministry events that involved meticulous preparation, such as twice-a-week scheduled practices in preparation for Sunday services. Similarly, the children's choir would rehearse up to six or seven times before a scheduled performance. All of that preparation instilled in me a fundamental belief: ministry is not a matter of chance but one of dedication and discipline, and therefore, it is about striving for excellence. Whatever ministry activity I happened to partake in, a level of excellence was always both expected and required.

Once I entered my teenage years, my involvement in ministry expanded to include participation in my church's step team. Through these activities, I developed a profound appreciation for the value of fellowship and brotherhood within a church setting. One particularly influential figure in this regard was Brother Stanley Holbrook, our step troop leader, who instilled in us a deep sense of discipline.

Our step team performances were modeled after the traditions of historically African-American fraternities and required intense preparation and commitment. We practiced three times a week for three to four months in anticipation of performances, and Brother Holbrook consistently challenged us to think ahead. His philosophy emphasized not only achieving excellence in the present but also planning for success in the future. This mindset became deeply ingrained in me and carried forward when my peers and I assumed leadership of the step team in high school. We maintained the same commitment to excellence, striving for both immediate success and long-term growth.

Music continued to serve as a vital component of my spiritual development. My mother, who was the minister of music, ensured that all children in the choir not only learned the lyrics but also mastered proper vocal techniques. She instilled in us the principle that every performance should be approached as if it were our last, emphasizing that our ultimate audience was God.

Beyond our designated children's choir performances, we were also required to sing alongside the adult choir on first Sundays. This strategic decision exposed us to more complex musical arrangements, preparing us for future leadership within the church's music ministry. A memorable example of this preparation occurred when a lead soloist from the adult choir fell ill the night before a service. The understudy—a fellow member of the children's choir—was able to step in seamlessly, delivering the solo with precision and confidence. This moment underscored the importance of rigorous preparation and the pursuit of excellence.

Additionally, our choir's dedication to excellence extended beyond vocal performance. For three months, we practiced a coordinated choir march, which served as a symbolic representation of our church's discipline and unity. Such traditions reinforced the idea that ministry required not only talent but also commitment and perseverance.

My college years further shaped my understanding of ministry and faith. During my first two years, my primary focus was on academics and basketball. However, upon transferring to the University of Pittsburgh in my junior year, my engagement in ministry deepened. I joined the college gospel choir, which was not merely a musical group but a transformative spiritual movement on campus. Under the leadership of my wife, Dr. Tracy Hunt, who served as the choir's president, we initiated a Monday night Bible study. What began as a small gathering of three to five students quickly grew into a weekly meeting of approximately fifty attendees. This period cultivated my passion for ministry and my desire to help others discover and fulfill their God-given potential.

Unlike the stereotypical college experience of partying and indulgence, my journey was marked by profound theological discussions and faith-building experiences. One of the most defining moments of my academic career was enrolling in a course on the history of Christianity. This class challenged my faith in unexpected ways, often leaving me and my peers questioning foundational theological beliefs. Many students dropped the course midway through the semester due to the intensity of its content, which deconstructed traditional Christian doctrines rather than reinforcing them.

During this period of spiritual uncertainty, a group of friends and I sought refuge in Saturday Night Live services at Mount Ararat Baptist Church. One particular evening, the sermon began with the question: *Is God real?* This moment resonated deeply with us,

as it directly addressed the theological doubts we had been grappling with in our coursework. The sermon not only reaffirmed our faith but also solidified our commitment to standing firm in our beliefs despite intellectual challenges.

By the end of the semester, our professor revealed that she was, in fact, a Christian and that the course was intentionally designed to dismantle traditional understandings in order to facilitate the development of a more personal and resilient faith. In hindsight, I am grateful for that semester of theological testing, as it ultimately strengthened my spiritual foundation. Recognizing that others might undergo similar crises of faith, I became increasingly committed to studying Scripture deeply so that I could support those facing theological uncertainty. This realization accelerated my decision to pursue ministry wholeheartedly, ensuring that I was equipped to help others navigate their own faith journeys.

My experiences in ministry—spanning from childhood to college—have profoundly shaped my approach to leadership, faith, and excellence. From my early years of disciplined preparation in music and church operations to my adolescent experiences in fellowship and my theological trials in college, each stage has contributed to my spiritual and professional development. I have come to understand that excellence is not an abstract concept but a disciplined mindset that requires intentional effort. Ministry, much like life, demands preparation, perseverance, and an unwavering commitment to growth. These lessons have not only informed my ministerial career but have also influenced my broader professional aspirations, reinforcing the belief that true excellence must be cultivated through deliberate action and a steadfast pursuit of purpose.

After juggling two full-time jobs, one part-time job, and a night school schedule for 3 years, I finally completed my undergraduate work and relocated to Baltimore, Maryland. I was raised as a Pastor's Kid in Pittsburgh. There, in every place that I would go throughout the city within an African American community and particularly in the church, people knew exactly who my parents were, thus knowing immediately that I belonged to them. This upbringing instilled in me discipline and faith but also created a longing for independence, an opportunity to establish my identity. Upon graduating, I began to create my own path, leaving Pittsburgh and settling in Baltimore, a city where, initially, other than my then-fiancée and her family, no one knew me.

My transition to Baltimore really changed my life. Poor and struggling, I lived in a modest efficiency in northeast Baltimore. One defining moment for me was coming home from a weekday service only to find that my lights have been cut off. The following three months was extremely tough because I could not afford to pay my light bill and will come home to a dark house every night. The adjustment was tough, but I welcomed the sense of freedom from expectations and judgments that had followed me in Pittsburgh. I attended several churches during my first few months in town, looking for a place that would accept me separate from the affiliations of my past. Eventually, I started attending my wife's church, joining somewhat as an introverted member. Pretty soon, some gaps in ministry placed me in an active role of continuity, whether it was teaching Bible study, playing drums, or whatever needed to be done. Six months into our marriage, the pastor asked me to join the full-time staff as the Youth Director (Pastor).

My formative leadership years inculcated the importance of hard work and time management. My first job, at McDonald's, which I commuted to and from by bus,

reinforced this. I can vividly remember my parents stating that I have to now take responsibility for myself which included finding transportation to him from work. They said one day you'll understand why these lessons are earlier or better to learn earlier than later. These values became priceless when I stepped into ministry leadership. At First Mt. Olive Baptist Church, the challenge was an uphill battle from the beginning. Taking over a ministry that saw significant exits after my predecessor, there was much resistance and skepticism. Additionally, not much planning through transitions left the youth feeling abandoned.

These tensions pushed me to grow as a leader and develop resilience, especially in leading my peers and earning the congregation's trust. Deacon Sharon Sauls, the church's Director of Operations, was instrumental in my professional development. She challenged me each week to not just be a "churchman" but a transformational leader. Under her mentorship and with the support of my wife, I faced perfectionism and learned to share responsibility and empower. Because of this new paradigm shift, our ministry was able to expand its capacity, mobilizing more children and youth.

Bishop Brown, my pastor, also taught me about leadership on an informal basis. His philosophy that "ministry is caught, not necessarily taught" was priceless as we traveled to conferences and revivals across the country. Exposure to other ministries broadened my perspective and created innovative ideas that I later implemented at First Mt. Olive. Yet, through this, the same relationship also elicited pillars in communication and support, especially in seeking clarification from me with regard to my strengths and further areas of growth. A pivotal conversation with my pastor drove home the importance of intentional recognition and feedback, which I did not receive.

It further developed leadership competencies outside the traditional church context by transitioning into a role as a Community Schools Director at the YMCA. Among such settings are where managing staff, connecting communities with resources, and helping to try to address some of the systemic challenges, which really helped deepen my experiences of servant leadership. That role reinforced a balance of compassion and accountability, underlined during the pandemic when I helped lead food distribution to families in need. Part of my role was to plan out goals in one, three, and five-year increments. I combined entrepreneurial pursuits with professional work over the years-feeling the exhilaration and the stress of rapid business growth. Through these experiences, lessons on capacity management and well-being were learned. In this position, I was truly pastoring the community. Working in a school and local community that was 99% African-American helped. Remind me of the strong sense of community that our ancestors built. Unfortunately, the planning and foresight that they had did not transfer to the current generations. The large majority of parents and community members did not have accurate resources for their families let alone their community. In my role, I bridge the gap by providing GED classes for those who out of school and also job opportunities for those who needed them. I was tasked in this role with ensuring that we were meeting the actual needs of the community at not just what we thought the community needed. Part of my role was to perform a needs assessment which included the parent students and community members. It was through this process that I saw what was needed not only now, but could forecast for the future and possibly fill the gap sooner than later.

Leaving this position after five years, gave me space to be an entrepreneur and build a business. Why also reigniting the passion that I always had for community. After a year of being away from community work, I was excited to be extended the offer to return to the community schools arena.

Going back to the YMCA in an executive leadership role got me back to my passion for the community by applying my professional competencies with the integration of a spiritual calling. Collaboration, adaptability, and intentionality continue to be vital on this journey.

It was during this time that I was also an intricate part in establishing different coalition that our local facility needed. We looked at the community data while examining the needs of our membership and designed coalitions that we strategically place and organize to meet their needs. It was great to see not only the organization succeed, but all most importantly, seeing the needs of everyone be met by the resources and partnerships that we formed. I am committed to being Jesus' hands and feet in building, serving, and leading in ministry, community service, or business that transforms people and changes lives.

Synergy

These years at First Mt. Olive and my work within the church brought me to a critical intersection: the need to explore African American pastoral leadership and how it is going to meet the needs of the congregations. All too often, African American churches center on one senior leader who may make decisions without taking into full consideration the needs of the congregation or the long-term viability of the church. Few

pastors have the backing, the resources, or even the time to do deep research, the kind so urgently needed to inform decisions and plan for the future. As a result, far too many leaders are only barely keeping their heads above water, their energies consumed by reactive strategies rather than proactive ones that can bring growth and vitality. COVID expedited the need to plan for the future needs of the church effectively. It is no surprise that African American churches suffered heavily from the pandemic, with many having to close their doors. Many churches were forced to temporarily cease services in their buildings due to social distancing mandates from public health and limitations in the number of people permitted in group gatherings. Many churches have not reopened due in large part to financial burdens, decreased membership, and a heightened desire for online options in worship.[3]

Other factors besides the pandemic contributed to such closures. Going online reduced the physical presence of the churches, negatively impacting their major source of income: donations. This reduction in donation revenues hit African American churches particularly hard, as many of them already operated on shoestring budgets. Moreover, many of their congregants were older and found it difficult to adjust to life in the digital world, further eroding a sense of community.

It has also shed light on the longstanding financial vulnerabilities of churches struggling to cover operational costs from building maintenance to salaries and regular tithes. These closures, especially of the historically critical cultural hubs known as African American churches, had a huge emotional impact as centers of social and material support for the people who often had nowhere else to go with their burdens and

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[3] A. Koduah and O. Onyinah, *Sociocultural Life in the COVID-19 Era: A Ghanaian Christian Response* (Nairobi, KEN: Osha Publishing, 2024), 46.

problems. The ban on holding in-person services curtailed the possibility of getting the needed supportive care for them during the extraordinary pressure that many experience. Where many other Caucasian congregations planned for rainy days by having endowment funds and other means of income to maintain them in difficult seasons, African American congregations cannot plan because they are barely making it.[4]

I want to fill this gap by devising some practical tools and methods that any pastor, irrespective of the size or resources of the congregation, can use in assessing their current practice, mapping the needs of their congregation, and planning for the future in light of this. Building on my experience with community schools and building businesses tailored to community needs, I hope to bring a research-driven approach to the church context. Most decisions within many churches are intuitively made or based on tradition, not by data and analysis. This project tries to change that paradigm.

This will be a very formal needs assessment and five-year strategic planning process that clearly spells out the identified needs and assets within the church and the local community. It encompasses collecting information from a wide array of stakeholders through the survey process to bring valuable insights into strategic planning. Involving the stakeholders ensures that decisions will be informed, inclusive, and reflective of the unique context in which the congregation serves.

This approach emphasizes aligning the ministry to spiritual and practical needs in the congregation and community. This project will allow pastors and church leaders to lead with clarity, purpose, and a forward-thinking mindset, thus enabling them to create

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[4] A. Powell and K. Sumner, *The Role of Black Church Leaders in Vaccine Communication* (Chicago, IL: Cham Springer, 2025), 2.

healthier and more sustainable churches by providing a replicable model for needs assessment and strategic planning.

CHAPTER TWO

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

The Gospel of Luke presents a plethora of Jesus' teachings that were quite challenging to listeners in their spiritual commitments and priorities. Of the most important teachings, perhaps Luke 14:28-33 is a passage that really underlines how crucial potential disciples must consider the cost of making their decisions to follow Jesus.[1] Employing two of the most potent metaphors, a man building a tower and a king going to war, Jesus highlights reflection and deliberateness that should hallmark the life of a disciple. The graphic imagery and appeal for radical self-denial marking this passage make it an invitation to profound theological reflection and practical application.

In the center of Luke 14:28-33 lies the sacrifices, intentionality, and uncompromised commitments that are called forth as the preconditions to true discipleship. This teaching fell on a mixed assembly of adherents and critics alike and thus is universally considered a call to place Christ's allegiance above all.[2] Still today, quite contemporarily, it addresses the same searching question to the Christian, regardless of culture and generation. Are they willing to give up all for Christ? The central message

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[1] Alan J Hauser, "Biblical Interpretation, History of," in *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, eds. John D. Barry, et al. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016), 432.

[2] J. B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1997), 18.

of Luke 14:28–33 is the cost of discipleship.[3] Other than superficial or casual allegiance, to follow Christ means taking an honest look at what sacrifices are to be made sacrifices, which may well include personal ambitions, material possessions, and even relationships if they stand in the way of loyalty to Christ.[4] This text puts before us a demanding yet transforming discipleship, costly in its calculated risks yet rewarding in spiritual fulfillment. This theme is in line with broader Lukan motifs, including the reversal of worldly expectations, prioritizing the kingdom of God, and a call to radical renunciation. Jesus does not minimize the rigors of discipleship but rather emphasizes its transformative power through complete surrender to God's will.[5]

The passage of Luke 14:28–33 deserves closer attention for the raising of some critical theological and practical questions, which this chapter tries to answer. For example, what does Jesus mean by "counting the cost," and how do the metaphors of construction and warfare illustrate this principle? Further, how does this passage fit within the larger literary and thematic context of Luke's Gospel? Understanding its placement within the Gospel's narrative framework-especially within the Travel Narrative of Luke 9:51-19:27, reveals a deeper meaning. This section focuses on the kingdom of God, the turning around of human ways, and the sacrifices of discipleship.[6] The research will also analyze the modern applications of this teaching, considering its relevance to be

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[3] Gerhard Friedrich Kittel and Geoffrey William Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Abridged in One Volume* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1985), 141.

[4] K. E. Bailey, *Poet and Peasant and Through Peasant Eyes: A Literary-Cultural Approach to the Parables in Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1983), 78.

[5] J. Nolland, “Luke 9:21–18:34,” in *Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1993), 232.

[6] Bailey, *Poet and Peasant and Through Peasant Eyes*, 80.

continuous in tackling issues such as materialism, loyalty, and spiritual endurance within a Christian's life today.[7] The historical and cultural context of first-century Palestine adds weight to the meaning of Luke 14:28–33. These two metaphors will have struck a real chord with Jesus' listeners, representing as they do the everyday realities of building a tower and going to war.[8] Large-scale building projects required detailed planning, as did the declaration of war. The unfinished tower was a powerful metaphor for lack of preparation and wasted effort. Here, of course, it would be an appropriate illustration of a decision as important as discipleship. These metaphors also represent a larger biblical concern with the theme of preparation and judgment seen in texts such as Isaiah 5:2 and Proverbs 24:27.[9]

The immediate context in which Luke 14:28–33 is set clarifies its statement. In the passage immediately before this, Jesus has just said that disciples must "hate" the closest relationships and even their own lives to be His followers, a statement made in hyperbolic language, underlining the absolute priority of allegiance given to Christ.[10]

The teaching that follows that salt cannot lose its saltiness, in Luke 14:34–35- emphasizes the same point of maintaining one's identity and purpose as a disciple. Together, they provide a cohesive message about true discipleship: costly yet priceless.[11]

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[7] I. H. Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1978), 99.

[8] Nolland, “Luke 9:21–18:34,” 233.

[9] Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 112.

[10] Robert H. Mounce, “Romans,” *The New American Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1995), 149.

[11] John Durham, “Exodus,” in *The World Biblical Commentary* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 228.

Luke 14:28-33 is a countercultural text that runs against the tendencies of superficial commitments and convenience driven faith. The call for reflective, complete surrender on its lips echoes not only in the hearts of individual believers but also in the minds of Christian communities that try to live up to the Gospel values in their institutional and personal lives.[12]

Through the prism of calculated commitment, Jesus invites his followers into a transforming relationship that will reorder priorities, shape identities, and guide actions. The message is just as valid today as it was then, with real advice on how to work one's way through the minefields of faith and discipleship in everyday life. Such are the metaphors, context, and theological implications involved in Luke 14:28-33 that this present study shall further seek to shed light on some very strong demands and rewards associated with discipleship as put across by Jesus in the Gospel of Luke.[13] The challenge remains an ageless appeal to believers toward wholly aligning their lives to the kingdom of God.[14]

In the ancient Near East, where warfare was not infrequent, the political and military reality here in Luke 14:31–32 finds its metaphorical expression in a king preparing to go to war. It would be the conventional duty of any serious leadership to reassess all its resources, alliances, and prospects for success before launching a war against anyone. Apart from that, one could risk an awesome defeat, or even worse, public

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[12] D. L. Bock, *Luke: 9:51–24:53*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1994), 16.

[13] Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 91.

[14] Nolland, “Luke 9:21–18:34,” 236.

humiliation, as when the entire kingdom was lost to an opponent.[15] This is a metaphor using seriousness equivalent to the making of a strategic decision of monumental importance. The socio-economic conditions of first-century Palestine further sharpen this analogy poignantly. To the largely lower-class audience that had listened to Jesus, the outcomes of a badly undertaken project, or one with poorly considered decisions, were rather bleak since such failures often meant financial or social ruin. Drawing from the common experience of these, Jesus emphasizes that to follow Him requires reflective and thoughtful commitment, for not finishing the race will lead to spiritual ruin.[16]

The comprehensive meaning of discipleship in Luke's Gospel can be summed up by Luke 14:28-33. For Luke, there is much more to discipleship than a surface-level association with Jesus; for Luke, discipleship involves an intentional and directed life marked by denial of self, renunciation, and obedience. This text weaves several key motifs that recur throughout the Gospel. One of the major themes is a call to radical commitment, as seen in the early chapters of Luke. Discipleship requires one to let go of possessiveness, attachments to family, and personal ambitions. It is explicitly expressed in Luke 9:23 that "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me." This call to count the cost in Luke 14:28–33 is another expression of this same theme, as it invokes people who would be his disciples to consider the sacrifices and hard times that go with following Jesus.

Another dominant theme in Luke's Gospel is that of reversal, where the current values and expectations of society are turned upside down. Throughout the book, Luke

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[15] Bock, *Luke: 9:51–24:53,* 16.

[16] Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 26.

portrays Jesus' ministry to the marginalized while condemning the rich and powerful, as clearly stated in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Lk. 16:19–31). In Luke 14:28–33, this theme of reversal comes out implicitly through its critique of superficial or half-hearted commitments and stresses that true discipleship requires wholehearted devotion. The question of discipleship is framed within the wider context of the kingdom of God. Jesus' call to count the cost underlines the transformative and all-encompassing nature of the kingdom.[17]

Entrance into the kingdom is not a casual decision but a radical reorientation of life around God's purposes. The imagery of building and war evokes comprehensive commitment, persistence, and readiness for spiritual struggles. Therefore, Luke 14:28–33 makes an invaluable contribution to the overall themes of the Gospel by showing just how serious a decision following Jesus is. It challenges the reader to go beyond shallow faith to costly but purposeful discipleship.[18]

Functions of metaphor and images are fully enlightened in their historical and cultural contexts of first-century Palestine. Towers, often constructed to guard vineyards or store supplies, required substantial planning and resources. Poor planning would be assumed to be public humiliation and a waste of effort; thus, the picture of an incomplete tower is a strong metaphor for the lack of fulfillment of promised devotion. The image of warfare also suggests deliberateness with calculation since battles were usually won based on proper and strategic planning. From both metaphors, the need for preparation and foresight is emphasized, which discipleship similarly requires. The thematic

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[17] Bock, *Luke: 9:51–24:53,* 25.

[18] Bock, *Luke: 9:51–24:53,* 27.

importance of Luke 14:28–33 is furthered by its literary placement within the Travel Narrative, Luke 9:51–19:27. This section of the Gospel has been characterized by Jesus' teaching about the kingdom of God, the reversal of worldly priorities, and the sacrifices that are demanded from His followers. The preceding teaching of Luke 14:25–27 demands the greatest love of Christ, even over family and self, while the parabolic teaching, which immediately follows salt that has lost its flavor (Lk. 14:34–35), emphasizes the necessity of maintaining one's purpose as a disciple.[19] These two texts are, therefore, complementary contrasting truths on the costliness of true discipleship and what it brings about. This means the theological implications of Luke 14:28–33 run into modern times for Christian practice.[20] These metaphors challenge believers to place their faith above personal ambitions, material possessions, and competing allegiances. They support the idea of discipleship being a total commitment to Christ that reorders priorities and demands continuous surrender. This theme rhymes with other Lukan passages, such as Luke 9.23, which calls for daily self-denial as a condition of discipleship. A renunciation of possessions in Luke 14:33 is more than material poverty; it is a disposition of dependence upon God, a refusal of attachment to whatever obstructs spiritual growth.[21]

This requirement of radical commitment in Luke 14:28–33 reflects an intrusive kingdom of God in one's life. Discipleship portrayed here is a faith that actively and intentionally aligns itself with God's purposes. These metaphors of building and warfare

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[19] Nolland, *Luke 9:21–18:34*, 235.

[20] Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology* (Colorado Springs, CO: Chariot Victor Publishing, 1981), 119.

[21] K. E. Bailey, *Poet and Peasant and Through Peasant Eyes: A Literary-Cultural Approach to the Parables in Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1983), 92.

serve to press the issue of the cost regarding an adequate understanding by the believer in careful sacrifice. The challenge goes on, today as it has over the ages, to those of the present Christianity in the matter of living the ethic upon a humbled, just, and spiritual life enduring pattern of Christian living and showing that discipleship's cost is highly demanding and concurrently extremely rewarding. With its historical, literary, and theological fullness, Luke 14:28–33 remains one of the passages that inspire and direct believers on their journey of faith.

This passage represents the theological tension between grace and works, an inherent dynamic tension within the Christian life. As certainly as salvation is a gift of grace, as articulated in Ephesians 2:8–9, discipleship requires effort, intentionality, and personal responsibility. The call to "count the cost" reinforces the active participation of the believer in living out his faith. This is not an oppositional relationship between works and faith but a complementary one since James 2:26 says, "Faith without works is dead." Then, discipleship would be the practical expression of trust in Christ, which is rooted in the grace that makes such devotion possible.[22]

This is where, on an individual level, this passage calls on believers to reevaluate what they focus their time, energies, and thoughts on, whether Christ is central. On a corporate level, churches are called to model discipleship through fostering communities that will emulate a life of accountability, sacrifice, and service. Luke 14:28-33 describes the Christian identity as an intentional, costly journey. Because of this, the mission-laden identity emboldens Christians to consider the cost of discipleship and widen the kingdom

[22] Paul Tillich, *Theology of Culture* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1964), 45.

of God inside the diverse cultures or societies mostly neutral or even hostile toward God's values.[23]

Luke 14:28–33 has close parallels in Matthew 10:37–39 and Mark 8:34–38, both with a strong emphasis on the cost of discipleship and total allegiance to Christ. Thus, Jesus says in Matthew 10:37–39, "Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me," which articulates the very radical call of Luke to prioritize devotion to Christ above family ties. Both stress that self-denial is a feature of discipleship. Whereas Matthew has insisted on the relational and emotional losses that are involved, Luke insists that calculated commitment and conscious choice are demanded.[24]

Mark 8:34–38 adds to this perspective the irony of discipleship: losing one's life to save it. The call to take up one's cross and follow Christ is also synonymous with the renunciation implied in Luke 14:27, which introduces the metaphors of building and warfare in 14:28–33.[25] Discipleship becomes both a rational abandonment and a willingness to suffer, with conscious deliberation meeting deep trust in God's promises.

Old Testament Parallels: Counting the Cost

Counting the cost is very much an Old Testament principle. Noah was called on to build an ark in obedience to God's instruction in the face of ridicule and at great personal cost, yet he showed great faith and perseverance. The attention to detail and unshakeable

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[23] John S. Klaasen, “Practical Theology: A Critically Engaged Practical Reason Approach of Practice, Theory, Practice and Theory,” *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 70, no. 2 (2014).

[24] Christopher Ben Simpson, *Modern Christian Theology* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury T and T Clark, 2016), 119.

[25] J. Gresham Machen, *The New Testament: An Introduction to Its Literature and History* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1997), 53.

resolve were vividly depicted in the parable of the builder in Luke 14:28-30. Similarly, faith spoken in the journey of Abraham describes the sort of all-engulfing devotion that discipleship calls for. It is evidenced in the leaving of his homeland, recorded in Genesis 12:1–4, and in the readiness to sacrifice Isaac, recorded in Genesis 22:1–19, both examples of commitment to God's promises at immense personal cost. These accounts foreshadow what Luke 14:33 calls the renunciation of all one possesses in a radical surrender that does not hold anything back from following Him.[26]

Early Christian thinkers interpreted Luke 14:28–33 as a call to radical discipleship and the importance of spiritual discipline. Origen requires one to renounce worldly attachment to amass the riches of the spirit, and this passage must, for that reason, be understood as an exhortation to detach from the things of the world[27]. Augustine, however, took the tower in Jesus' metaphor as an allegory of the Christian life. He showed that the construction of the tower was symbolic of the pursuit of holiness, which is a deliberate reflection and should be founded on Christ's teachings[28]. Luke 14:28–33 had the deepest impact on the monastic movement of the third and fourth centuries. The great leaders, including Antony of Egypt, took this passage to its fullest meaning, leaving all to live for God alone. Monastic communities were an expression of the call to count the cost by embracing poverty, obedience, and communal living as a radical expression of discipleship.[29]

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[26] Bailey, *Poet and Peasant and Through Peasant Eyes*, 121.

[27] Christopher Ben Simpson, *Modern Christian Theology* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury T and T Clark, 2016), 154.

[28] Simpson, *Modern Christian Theology*, 177.

[29] Bailey, *Poet and Peasant and Through Peasant Eyes,* 92.

The faith expressed in Abraham's journey characterizes the kind of all-consuming devotion that discipleship demands. The leaving of his homeland, recorded in Genesis 12:1-4, and the willingness to sacrifice Isaac, recorded in Genesis 22:1-19, give an example of a commitment to God's promises at immense personal cost. This passage also motivated some of the early Christian martyrs to commit to Christ, which would not blanch before the threat of death. Their refusal to deny their faith amidst awful persecution made them the first to pay the ultimate price of discipleship. These martyrs were celebrated in the early church as a literal fulfillment of Luke 14:28–33, who had given themselves in sacrifice for the sake of the kingdom.[30]

Theological and Practical Applications

The complexity of Luke 14:28-33 unfolds the many-sidedness of discipleship, combining theological reflection with pragmatic application. This text summons Christians to a life of deliberateness, sacrifice, and persistence and frames discipleship as both a personal journey and a communal responsibility. The metaphors of building and warfare emphasize preparation, foresight, and the gravity of the commitment required to follow Christ [31]To the Christian today, Luke 14:28–33 is a reminder that the road of discipleship is not casual; rather, it is one on which one has daily to die and live afresh, playing an active part in God's mission. Drawing upon its historical, literary, and theological dimensions, this passage continues to challenge and inspire believers to model a radical commitment at the heart of the Gospel message.

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[30] Nolland, *Luke 9:21–18:34,* 236.

[31] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (London, UK: SCM Press, 1959), 89.

Luke 14:28–33 was often allegorized in the medieval period: the tower represented the spiritual life, and the king going to war symbolized the believer's struggle against sin and the devil. Mystics such as Bernard of Clairvaux took the text as an invitation to inner spiritual discipline on the way to union with God. The Reformation era revived attention to the question of the cost of discipleship, especially around the matter of sanctification, and Martin Luther certainly emphasized the idea of bearing the cross as showing true faith, something that is, of course, central here in Luke 14.28–33. John Calvin similarly spoke emphatically of entering discipleship requiring renunciation of the right to the will of God.[32]

Contemporary Perspectives:

One of the most influential modern expositions of Luke 14:28–33 comes from Dietrich Bonhoeffer's seminal work.[33] Bonhoeffer distinguished between "cheap grace" and "costly grace," arguing that true discipleship demands absolute surrender to Christ. He interpreted the passage as a warning against complacency and a call to an active, sacrificial faith, even under persecution. These two metaphors of the builder and the king are important for Bonhoeffer to impress on us that intentional decision, in opposition to resistance, requires persistence.[34]

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[32] Walter Rauschenbush, *A Theology for the Social Gospel* (New York, NY: Abingdon Press, 1917), 196.

[33] Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 62.

[34] Walter A. Ewell and Barry J. Beitzel, *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 22.

The passage resonates deeply in areas of persecution or material poverty, with greater sensitivity abroad. For Christians living throughout the world whose profession of faith in Christ means imminent danger, particularly in large areas of both Africa and Asia, Luke 14:28–33 drives home what takes place daily for Christians weighing the options of following God against eternal hopes.[35] In highly restrictive countries toward Christianity, believers often view an application like that found within Luke chapter fourteen for perseverance and even valor in the middle of hardship. In these contexts, metaphors of preparation and endurance assume practical and urgent significance for persecuted Christians-both comfort and challenge. The passage validates the sacrifices while always urging them to faithful perseverance.[36]

The radical demands of discipleship in Luke 14:28-33 present a stark challenge in secular and postmodern societies driven by individualism, consumerism, and relativism. The passage demands a level of surrender that is often at the expense of career ambitions, social acceptance, and material comfort for the believer.[37] Consequently, church leaders have the task of modeling and teaching radical discipleship within a spiritually superficial culture. They are called to create an environment in which believers can make informed and sustained commitments to Christ, showing them that discipleship is a lifelong journey, not an instantaneous decision.[38]

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[35] J. Gresham Machen, *The New Testament: An Introduction to Its Literature and History* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1997), 148.

[36] Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 63.

[37] Linda D. Peacore, *Experience, Theology Of,* eds. William A. Dyrness and Veli— Matti Karkkéinen (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2020).

[38] Bock, *Luke: 9:51–24:53,* 384.

Luke 14:28–33 has some down-to-earth implications for individual believers who want to conform their lives to the kingdom of God through practices such as financial stewardship, ministry, prayer, and regular reading of scripture. The passage, as a whole, essentially teaches one to count the cost of every decision, lest each prove unworthy of Christ. Churches can assist believers in applying the principles of Luke 14:28–33 by discipleship programs, preaching and teaching, and community support.

It is important to design structured programs to teach people the challenges and responsibilities of following Christ. Preaching and teaching messages on discipleship is somewhat transforming, relating the messages through practical examples in light of contemporary reality. Building supportive environments that foster accountability, sacrifice, and service is also important.[39]

However, this radical call to renunciation is open to misunderstanding. One possible misunderstanding is legalism, which reduces discipleship to a set of rigid, self-denying rules or external acts, such as renouncing possessions or performing extreme sacrifices to prove oneself worthy. This would be a shift of focus from grace to turn discipleship into a system of human effort, which is contrary to the biblical teaching of salvation by grace through faith.[40]

Other risks include elitism, wherein this passage has been used to split the community of Christians into segments: the 'those who do renounce everything' could be more spiritual, growing in exclusivity and undermining the Gospel of inclusion. Interpretations like that run diametrically opposite to the Gospel's call, which calls all

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[39] N. T. Wright, *Luke for Everyone* (London, UK: SPCK Publishing, 2004), 98.

[40] Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 119.

irrespective of material and social status. The proper balance of understanding in Luke 14:28–33 must be found in the tension between the strenuous demands of discipleship and the unmerited grace of God. Jesus' summons to "count the cost" is a call not to a prerequisite for salvation but to full participation in the kingdom of God.[41] That balance makes plain that grace so enables believers to embrace the rigors of discipleship that sacrifice and suffering can be endured in the assurance of God's sustaining presence. Discipleship, understood in the context of Luke 14:28-33, as part of the larger tapestry of the Gospel, becomes a costly and life-altering venture.[42] The imagery of building and war illustrates the element of deliberateness and determination; the overriding theme of grace guarantees these imperatives rest on the foundation of God's enabling work. This understanding invites contemporary Christians to live out their faith with integrity, courage, and an unwavering commitment to Christ, embodying the radical discipleship that the passage so vividly portrays.[43]

This tension is brought into the light of day quite nicely in Paul's teaching in Philippians 2:12-13, where believers, though working out their salvation with fear and trembling, simultaneously realize that God is working inside of them.[44] The scripture proves active effort in putting forth discipleship but is still sustained by God's grace that bars both legalism and elitism.

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[41] Bailey, *Poet and Peasant and Through Peasant Eyes*, 121.

[42] Frank Thielman, “Ephesians,” in *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), 238.

[43] Wright, *Luke for Everyone*, 99.

[44] Wright, *Luke for Everyone*, 99.

One interpretative question with which most scholars wrestle when coming to Luke 14:28-33 is how to consider the realism versus the idealism of Jesus' call to discipleship within the current global setting.[45] The call to "renounce everything" would surely have been countercultural, if not impossible, in today's materialistic and individualistic world of convenience. Such a text would most definitely challenge any modern-day Christian to debate exactly what it means to live sacrificially in societies that lean toward personal gain versus collective well-being.[46]

It is within that radical call that many find relevance. Jesus was teaching in direct contrast to the status quo of his time, beckoning believers to live in the kingdom values so utterly different from earthly priorities. What the passage is a call to is not perfection but an invitation into the now-orphaned-better-orientation in life: ordered in God's intention, relying on God's grace, and surrendering-sacrificing when asked, if that is what it requires.[47]

Therefore, what does it practically mean for the Christian to renounce "everything"? The call-in Luke 14:33 immediately casts into light hundreds of questions concerning what such a demand might look like in reality. Does "all" refer merely to material things or, for that matter, immaterial-like relationships and ambitions, a right to self-determination? For Christians today, such reordering can take the shape of investing time in spiritual development, generosity, and God's mission rather than personal comfort.[48]

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[45] Victor H. Matthews, *Manners and Customs in the Bible: An Illustrated Guide to Daily Life in Bible Times* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2006), 87.

[46] Bock, *Luke: 9:51–24:53*, 16.

[47] Wright, *Luke for Everyone*, 99.

The second point is that the renunciation does not have to be "all" in a literal sense, but rather, all things belong to God and thus are to be stewarded. The section in Luke 14:28–33 considers the principle of forethought and preparation towards achieving long-term goals.[49] There is, in fact, much that could be learned in this teaching from many African American churches so deeply enshrined within communities wracked by years of systemic inequities and socio-economic challenges. Jesus has the call to "count the cost" against major obstacles.[50]

The metaphor of building a tower in verses twenty-eight through thirty underlines the necessity of vision and proper resource allocation to realize it. African American churches are often beacons within their communities, spiritually, socially, and economically uplifting their members.[51] Therefore, the church should carefully consider whether it has the capacity to deliver before beginning new ministries, building projects, or community projects.

Strategic planning inspired by this passage involves leading or casting vision, resource assessment, and long-term sustainability. Leading or casting vision clearly requires understanding, co-developing with, and expressing committedly to your church its mission and the purpose in keeping with the community. Resource assessment identifies resources to include financial, human, and spiritual so that it strives and achieves stated goals. Long-term sustainability ensures that projects and initiatives are

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[48] J. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1960), 23.

[49] Bailey, *Poet and Peasant and Through Peasant Eyes*, 93.

[50] Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 32.

[51] Machen, *The New Testament*, 53.

designed to be long-lasting and not mere unfinished work that can damage the church's credibility or effectiveness.

Conclusion

Throughout history, African American churches have usually spearheaded efforts to promote justice and equality. They have often energized movements ranging from the Civil Rights Movement to current efforts toward social justice, offering nuclei, perhaps, of activism and spiritual rejuvenation. This leadership presupposes acute foresight into the newly developing needs to which their communities need to turn for fulfillment.

The passage Luke 14:28–33 is relevantly peculiar in light of the historical struggles that the African American churches have gone through. Most of these churches had shoestring budgets and literally had to get very creative while ministering amidst systemic discrimination.[52] Counting the cost has been an enduring principle in building worship spaces, establishing schools, and reaching out to the community.[53] New challenges weigh upon today's African American churches: how to engage younger generations, how to address mental health concerns, and how to utilize technology in their ministry. In strategic planning, Luke 14:28-33 invites the church to adapt while centering its mission. This text continues to remind one to prioritize those initiatives that align with the core values and capacity of the church. This requires keen managerial leadership in strategic planning. Counting the cost involves identifying and training leaders who can manage resources, inspire others, and overcome the challenges faced in

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[52] Ewell and Beitzel, *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*, 359.

[53] Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 189.

this mission. The development of leadership ensures that the church is always ready to answer its call.[54]

The passage emphasizes the need to count the cost, which is an important principle that can be practiced effectively in the African American church. This can be done through financial audits that determine if resources are sustainable, by using community partnerships to leverage resources for increased capacity, and by putting in place systems of accountability and transparency in financial management. Luke 14:28–33 also introduces the concept of cost in the context of discipleship, which relates to church-wide initiatives.[55] To put this principle into practice, accountability practices within churches can be instituted, whereby congregants are called upon to commit to roles and responsibilities, review and change strategies on a regular basis, and celebrate milestones so that a sense of communal commitment and morale is developed. Such measures correspond with the call for intentionality and preparation in the passage, reflecting both theological and practical implications for today's faith communities.[56]

Luke 14:28–33 brings a balance between prudent planning and trust in God's provision. This is highly important in the African American church, that it might not fall into conservatism in planning but rather create bold faith-driven initiatives.[57] Since this church acknowledges that God's prowess places the church in a position whereby it can surmount challenges, strategic actions will foster obedience to the will of God. Younger

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[54] Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 190.

[55] Neil S. Wilson, ed., *The Handbook of Bible Application* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1992), 194.

[56] Wright, *Luke for Everyone*, 99.

[57] Ewell and Beitzel, *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*, 266.

generations contribute needed competencies, including those related to technology and social media, to bear on strategic planning in a way that fosters innovation. This thus provides a motivational framework for how all generations engage in the vision and budget of the church as a means for intergenerational collaboration.[58]

These principles in Luke 14:28–33 can do much to take the social impact of African American churches a long way. While dealing with needs related to food insecurity, education programs, and justice initiatives, these churches are called to strategize toward effective and sustainable work, for which this timeless passage provides a framework: how to marshal resources, overcome impediments, and nurture devotion.[59] Thereby, the passage has been foundational in many African American churches as a basis of ministry strategy. These metaphors of building a tower and preparing for war are set deep in the historical and cultural context of African American churches, emphasizing careful deliberation with steadfast faith. These metaphors give practical ministry guidance for the modern church to equip it to face challenges with clarity and direction. Yet even as it calls churches to count the cost, Luke 14:28-33 calls churches to trust God's provision in ways that free the church to pursue its kingdom mission. Herein lies the dual emphasis, a powerful model of planning and faith that will prove instructive to any African American church desiring to minister relevantly and actually be the presence of God within its community.

The COVID-19 pandemic shifted the social, economic, and spiritual landscape in such a profound way that communities all across the world will be impacted for

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[58] Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 77.

[59] Wright, *Luke for Everyone*, 129.

generations to come. Inevitably, the African American Church will face unparalleled challenges and opportunities alike. The reason is, as the church has been in the heart of the African American people, the ways in which the church strategically transitions into post-pandemic life is going to take great intention. Thus, strategic planning would be required so that newly emerging needs could be met, new opportunities realized, and the relevance and impact of the church continued. Because the church has always been at the core of the African American community, it will need to be particularly intentional about how it moves into the post-pandemic era through strategic planning. In such a way, strategic planning will be necessary to address newly emerging needs, capitalize on new opportunities, and ensure ongoing relevance and impact of the church.

One of the important roles of the African American church has been to provide spiritual nourishment and articulating concerns about socioeconomic disparity.[60] Since the pandemic, members had greater burdens, such as job loss, mental health breakdown, and lack of adequate food. Churches can strategize to plan with systematic needs for these essential elements and provide service accordingly. It could be the case, for instance, in partnerships with local organizations that can amplify the efforts by the church in addressing food deserts or providing mental health counseling, thus securing limited resources used efficiently.

More importantly, the pandemic necessitated the need for digital transformation in ministry. Almost universally, virtual platforms were used for worship and to continue the life of the community, making a compelling point that technology competency will be required going forward. Already comfortable with the use of digital tools, these young

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[60] Frederick L. Ware, *Methodology of Black Theology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2020), 39.

generations could very well hold a pivotal role in helping to move the church forward with its digital strategies. In other words, by bringing this knowledge into the strategic planning processes, African American churches can grow in reach, foster intergenerational collaboration, and adapt to changing ways of engagement in faith communities. Strategic investments in digital infrastructure, training, and social media presence will go a long way in sustaining hybrid models of worship and outreach and making them accessible to a diverse range of audiences.

Strategic planning is also a call to long-range vision, keeping the church visionary rather than reactive. The pandemic made us realize that global crises come without warning and take the world by surprise. Therefore, churches would be better armed through strategic planning to absorb unforeseen situations in the future. This helps foster resilience and repositions the Church as an anchor of stability and hope in community life.

Whether it be health or education, the church may lead specific efforts that resonate with the church's purpose and principles. Strategic planning, therefore, will play an important role in the African American church as the post-pandemic age continues to take shape. This would allow the church to respond to community needs, use digital transformation, achieve fiscal stability, and continue speaking its prophetic voice in social justice matters. By the grace of intentionality and inclusion in planning, the legacy of resilience and leadership can persist and meet the challenges of the modern era with faith and purpose.

CHAPTER THREE

HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS

Historically Black Colleges and Universities have played a transformative role in shaping the African American religious experience. Among these, HBCU divinity schools have been especially significant in nurturing spiritual leaders, theologians, and educators who have profoundly influenced the African American church. These schools have served as centers of theological reflection, intellectual robustness, and spiritual formation for clergy to be prepared to lead their congregations and movements for social justice and racial equality. The faith and liberation theology inculcated in such institutions enabled the African American community to pass through those moral and spiritual tests during certain periods of the forces of oppression, segregation, and systemic inequality.[1]

The development of the HBCU divinity schools traces back to the Reconstruction Era when newly freed African Americans, while learning to walk in new freedom, searched for education and spiritual guidance. Institutions like Howard University's School of Divinity, Morehouse School of Religion, Virginia Union University, and Shaw University Divinity School emerged out of this, affording access to theological education denied under slavery to African Americans.[2] These schools trained thought leaders who

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[1] W. E. B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Chicago, IL: A. C. McClurg and Company, 1903), 56.

[2] Peter J. Paris, *The Social Teaching of the Black Church* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1985), 67.

saw ministry as one platform wherein society could be changed. Men like Dr. Benjamin Elijah Mays, one of the leading theologians and former president of Morehouse College, undergirded with a theology that spoke both to spiritual and social liberation and thus captured the double focus of these divinity schools.[3]

These institutions did so much more outside of the realm of mere proselytization. They incubated hotbeds of enthusiasm for the movement and reared leaders whose struggles were threaded through religious insight. Figures like the Rev. Dr. Pauli Murray, who came out of Howard University's School of Divinity to become the first African American woman ordained to become an Episcopal priest, used their pulpits to struggle through the battle in the trenches towards racial and gender equity[4]. Similarly, Martin Luther King Jr. was an alumnus of Morehouse College; he drew heavily from the theological training and intellectual heritage of an HBCU divinity school in a manner that focused on justice and compassion throughout his ministry and activism.[5] These schools also played a very important role in the retention and development of the traditions of the African American Church. They fostered a structured environment in which the study and dissemination of Black preaching styles, gospel music, and theologies relevant to the lived experience of African Americans could be accomplished. It was here that the Black Church, so long considered the bedrock of African American communities, found an institutional partner in sustaining its cultural and spiritual dynamism. This emphasis on

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[3] Benjamin E. Mays, *Born to Rebel: An Autobiography* (New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971), 87.

[4] Harry V. Richardson and Nathan Wright, Jr., "African American Religion," in *The Black American Reference Book*, ed. Mabel M. Smythe (Englewood Cliff, NJ: Talbot Brothers, 1976), 219.

[5] Albert J. Raboteau, *Canaan Land: A Religious History of African Americans* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2001), 95.

contextual theology, interpreting scripture through the lens of the struggles and achievements of African Americans, provided further assurance that these institutions remained relevant and meaningful to the communities they served.[6] The emphasis is more on contextual theology, where interpreting scripture should consider African American struggles and successes.

Dr. Ellison's leadership style, visionary goals, and commitment to theological education positioned him as a transformative figure. He was joined by other HBCU presidents such as Dr. Benjamin Elijah Mays of Morehouse College and Dr. James Edward Shepard of North Carolina Central University.[7] While these leaders shared a common mission of advancing education for African Americans, their distinct approaches highlighted the diverse strategies necessary to navigate the systemic barriers of segregation and discrimination.

Dr. Ellison's leadership was defined by his focus on integrating theological education with social justice. His presidency at VUU emphasized the importance of training clergy not only for ministry but also for leadership in addressing racial and economic inequities. Ellison's approach resonated with the needs of the African American church, positioning it as both a spiritual refuge and a platform for activism.[8] This dual emphasis distinguished him from contemporaries like Dr. Mays, who prioritized a philosophy of character-building and intellectual excellence aimed at producing well-

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[6] Carlyle, F. Stewart, *If African American Church Growth: Twelve Principles for Prophetic Ministry* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1994), 185.

[7] Richard Resh, ed., *Black America: Confrontation an Accommodation in the 20th Century* (Lexington, KY: DC Heath and Company, 1969), 22.

[8] Raboteau, *Canaan Land*, 48.

rounded leaders capable of dismantling systemic racism through moral and ethical leadership.[9]

In contrast, Dr. Shepard focused on creating access to education for a broader population of African Americans. As the founder and president of North Carolina Central University, Shepard was instrumental in establishing professional programs that provided practical pathways to economic mobility. While Ellison and Mays concentrated on theological and liberal arts education, Shepard's pragmatic approach expanded the scope of HBCUs to include training in law, medicine, and public administration, meeting the immediate needs of a racially segregated workforce.[10]

Ellison's commitment to academic rigor and contextual theology aligned closely with the work of Dr. Mays, who led Morehouse College from 1940 to 1967. Both leaders emphasized the development of intellectual and ethical leadership within the African American community. Mays, however, was particularly known for his mentorship of Martin Luther King Jr., whose theology and activism were profoundly shaped by Mays's teachings.[11] Similarly, Ellison's influence extended through the clergy and leaders trained at VUU's School of Religion, many of whom became prominent figures in the civil rights movement.

Dr. Shepard's leadership highlighted a more institution-centered advocacy, focusing on securing funding and resources for his university to ensure its survival and growth. While Ellison and Mays engaged directly with the broader civil rights discourse

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[9] Mays, *Born to Rebel: An Autobiography*, 28.

[10] Geoff New, *Live, Listen, Tell: The Art of Preaching* (Carlisle, UK: Langham Preaching Resources, 2017), 145.

[11] Benjamin Mays, *Born to Rebel* (Athens, GA: University of George Press, 1971), 79.

through their theological and philosophical frameworks, Shepard concentrated on the practical aspects of institutional sustainability in a segregated educational system.[12]

All three leaders faced the formidable challenges of operating HBCUs in the Jim Crow South, where access to funding, resources, and political support was severely limited. Ellison's strategy of aligning theological education with social activism was innovative, providing a moral and intellectual foundation for addressing systemic oppression. Mays adopted a broader philosophical approach, advocating for the transformative power of education in cultivating individuals capable of reshaping society. Shepard, on the other hand, focused on expanding opportunities within existing structures, emphasizing professional education and economic advancement.[13]

Dr. John Malcus Ellison was a towering figure in this tradition. As the first African American president of Virginia Union University, one of the historically Black institutions steeped in the roots of the African American church, Ellison embodied what was possible through the transformative power of HBCU divinity schools. His presidency was a period of great advancement not only for VUU but also for the greater community of Black theologians and clergy. Under the leadership of Ellison came academic excellence, theological depth, and social responsibility. The Virginia Union divinity school trained skillful clergy under his leadership, but most importantly, nurtured a drive to attend to the evident growing social evils of this day.

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[12] DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 87.

[13] Juan Williams, *Eyes on the Prize: America's Civil Rights Years, 1954–1965* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1994), 183.

Ellison's legacy, however, makes little sense if one does not appreciate the bigger impact of these HBCU divinity schools on the African American Church. These schools formed his base, through which he attained the intellectual and spiritual resources with which to assume leadership. They also made available a professional network of peers and mentors who agreed with his understanding of the need for a Church that was simultaneously prophetic and pastoral. While this chapter explores further Dr. Ellison's contributions, attention needs to be given to the great bearing HBCU divinity schools had on the formation of his philosophy and approach to ministry.[14]

In all, HBCU divinity schools have indelibly left their mark upon the African American church, encouraging generations of leaders toward spiritual and social transformation. They have preserved Black Christianity's unique cultural and theological flavor while empowering clergy to address modern-day concerns with faith and courage effectively. Dr. John Malcus Ellison's story is one of many that underpins the profound impact of these institutions and continue to exert in the pursuit of justice and equality.

His reach at the university extended to Virginians at large. During his era, VUU began to take the lead in producing leaders in education, civil rights, and public affairs. Ellison wanted to develop more leadership within VUU, so during his tenure, he provided a pipeline of graduates committed to uplifting all the communities that touched them.

In the face of racial segregation, Ellison had the great foresight to advance a leadership model that balanced resistance to injustice with a commitment to collaboration and dialogue. He deeply believed that education was one of the strongest methods for

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[14] Charles Marsh, *God's Long Summer: Stories of Faith and Civil Rights* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015), 41.

tearing down barriers and engendering social progress. This belief guided his efforts to strengthen VUU's academic programs and ensure the university remained a leading institution for African American education in the South.[15]

With this realization of an acute need for system reform, Ellison placed the institution as a hub for intellectual and social activity. He got the students and faculty involved with the Civil Rights Movement and supported all initiatives that promoted racial equality in the South. This he did by developing liaisons between the institution and the various churches, community groups, and civil rights organizations in the area as a whole.[16]

Ellison's leadership extended to practical community development. He called for programs that would help African Americans overcome their problems of poverty and poor social conditions. By encouraging education for empowerment, Ellison made African American communities more viable in fighting for their rights and quality of life. Ellison's progressive vision has kept VUU abreast of African American higher education. He helped the university through such bad times as segregation and laid the ground for further growth in influence. It is a certainty that his emphasis on academic excellence, social engagement, and leadership development has made VUU graduates continue contributing meaningfully both in the region and beyond.

Dr. John Malcus Ellison grasped the profound issues an unlettered clergy in the African American church could pose. He lived in a systemically racist and economically disfranchised society, wherein many African American pastors were denied formal

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[15] Raboteau, *Canaan Land,* 19.

[16] DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 22.

theological training. For that matter, most of them were not well prepared to respond to the complex spiritual, social, and political needs of the congregation. In other words, a weak theological underpinning kept the clergy away from contextual scripture interpretations, critical discussions about justice and equality, and adequate pastoral care for their people within an extremely fast-evolving society.[17]

Religious Views: A Theology of Liberation and Service

Ellison's religious outlook originated in a theology that focused on liberation, service, and the moral necessity of confronting injustice. To the minister and theologian, the African American church was supposed to bear a two-sided responsibility: to foster the spiritual well-being of its constituents and to challenge the systemic inequities African Americans experienced. Ellison's faith was based on the conviction that Christianity had to act against oppression, which put him in line with the emergent Black liberation theology of the mid-twentieth century.[18]

Ellison argued for a contextual theology in which African American clergymen interpret scripture in light of their communities' unique struggles and triumphs. He viewed an articulate theological education as eventually preparing ministers for the double task of leading their congregations in faith and in the fight for equality in human dignity.

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[17] Wyatt Tee Walker, *Somebody's Calling My Name: Black Sacred Music and Social Change* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1979), 12.

[18] Paul E. Johnson, ed., *African American Christianity: Essays in History* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994), 3.

Political Views: Education is Empowerment

This doctor's political philosophy was based upon an education that empowered. He realized that education tended to act as a disinhibiting influence, breaking chains of poverty and discrimination that still encumbered Africans in the American South during this period. Ellison believed in and developed African American institutions such as VUU as a serious means of gaining ascendancy in social affairs. He balanced bold advocacy with strategic dialogue and collaboration, recognizing that in this era, open defiance of segregation could provoke a violent backlash. This was a very pragmatic approach in line with the belief of Ellison in the collective action of individuals and long-range planning as a means through which systemic change could be accomplished.[19]

Where Faith and Politics Meet

In that respect, Ellison's fusion of political and religious thought became intertwined with his use of the African American church as an agent for social change. He saw the church as the place best prepared to rally individuals and affect civic dialogue. For this reason, Ellison strived to educate clergy with a firm foundation in theology and social questions so that they could act as leaders and lead their congregations into active participation in the struggle for civil rights.[20]

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[19] James H. Cone, *Theology of Black Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1970), 231.

[20] C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990), 29.

Legacy of Political and Religious Vision

Into how one lives political and religious philosophy, one finds a measure of influence concerning what stands in permanence for Dr. Ellison. By allowing theological education together with social concern and justice, Ellison laid formative elements among the African American Church to enable it to confront spiritual and society-changing tasks for an entire generation with the feeling that faith and activism belonged seamlessly integrated with one another; therein lies the foundational layers, at VUU specifically, of emerging leaders who thus understood the intrinsic linkage of these ideas for a new emerging generation of future faith activism.[21] Indeed, the commitment of Ellison to the moral responsibility of the church in the fight against injustice keeps echoing in most discussions on race and religion. His belief in education as a means to empowerment is so real in the continuing struggle for equality and opportunity. Both as a theologian and a political thinker, Ellison personified the power of faith to inspire change and the necessity for strategic action if lasting progress is to be achieved.

Ellison had an inclination to believe that the educated clergy were not only instrumental in spiritual guidance but also helped the African American community at large to self-develop. This he knew from the fact that many pastors still had to act twofold, namely, as spiritual and social workers, and in many cases, the lack of higher education curbed them in various manners. It is this belief that gave impetus to his commitment to the establishment and growth of institutions such as the Virginia Union

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[21] Vincent P. Franklin, *Living Our Stories, Telling Our Truths: Autobiography and the Making of the African American Intellectual Tradition* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1995), 98.

University School of Religion, one of the pioneering seminaries intended for the training of African American ministers.[22]

Ellison's future vision opened paths toward formal theological education. The educated clergy now had the skills to preach more relevant and contextual sermons, organize congregation membership in regular, systematic work toward social justice, and support effective community struggles for systemic change. These seminaries, therefore, became the cradles for a new generation of leadership that was spiritually sound and intellectually prepared to face societal inequities, making the African American church continue to be an agent of transformation both in faith and society.

Dr. John Malcus Ellison was the first African American president of Virginia Union University and stands as a pivotal figure in the history of theological education in the United States. Under his leadership, not only did the institution change, but his influence reached deep and touched the very development of its School of Religion in ways that would last.[23] It was during this period that systemic racism and the call for limited educational opportunities faced the African American community, and Dr. Ellison emerged as a leader who merged academic rigor, faith, and a commitment to social justice. His vision for the School of Religion extended beyond the production of clergy; rather, it looked toward the creation of leaders prepared to address spiritual, social, and political concerns that beset their respective communities.

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[22] Franklin, *Living Our Stories, Telling Our Truths,* 112.

[23] Gardner C. Taylor, *Faith in the Fire: Wisdom for Life* (New York, NY: Crossroad Publishing, 2005), 56.

This chapter explores Dr. Ellison's contribution to Virginia Union University's School of Religion, describing his philosophy of leadership, changes in structure and curriculum, and impact on the greater African American church and the Civil Rights Movement. History, scholarly literature, and personal testimony will bear witness that, during his presidency, Dr. Ellison reshaped theological education and left his indelible mark on the African American religious and educational landscape.[24]

Early Life and Academic Preparation

Born in 1898 in Westmoreland County, Virginia, the early years of Dr. Ellison were typical of many who had to bear the brunt of segregation and struggle in the quest to have quality education. Notwithstanding these barriers, Ellison was a good student and went on to Virginia Union University, graduating in 1924 with a bachelor's degree. His interest in theological studies took him to Oberlin College for his Master of Divinity degree and later to the University of Chicago, where he received a doctorate in theology in 1935.[25]

In the early twentieth century, few African Americans had the academic achievements of Ellison; thus, he was uniquely qualified to lead an institution like Virginia Union. His education from prestigious institutions introduced him to advanced theological frameworks and pedagogical approaches, which he later applied to the School of Religion.

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[24] D. H. Levine, "On Premature Reports of the Death of Liberation Theology," *The Review of Politics* (1995): 88.

[25] R. Drew Smith, "African American Clergy and Leadership in the Civil Rights Movement." *Journal of Religious Thought* 65, no. 3 (2010).

Leadership as President of Virginia Union University

Dr. Ellison assumed the presidency in 1941, the first African American to hold it. His administration coincided with a period of huge social and political shifts in the United States. During World War II, racial tensions were high, and the increasing civil rights struggle called for fresh leadership among African Americans. Ellison realized well the role that Virginia Union's School of Religion could play in this transformation process.

He set higher standards for the institution, more directly to the School of Religion, due to his strong belief in African American clergy intellectually and spiritually equipped to deal with the complex issues within the churches. At this time, Ellison was the stronghold whereby theological preparation with activism found its life and voice within the School of Religion.[26]

Dr. Ellison envisioned a great reform of its curriculum and organization. Most ministers, who at the time of entering the ministry were African Americans, had just basic education without significant university preparation. Here, Ellison strived to do the opposite thing, which had to be high education and rigorous academic excellence for all ministers, both black and white. He introduced courses that combined theology with practical ministry, ethics, and social justice to make sure graduates could serve spiritual needs as well as social ones in their communities.

Ellison further invested in faculty development, adding scholars with advanced degrees that represent a variety of theological perspectives. These high academic

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[26] Gayraud S. Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1983), 16.

standards elevated the School of Religion's profile and drew students from every corner of the country. Ellison further developed the library and research facilities of the school, allowing both students and faculty to engage in advanced theological scholarship. The rigorous academic standards created a high-profile establishment within the School of Religion and a student body recruited from all sections of the country. Ellison enlarged the library and research facilities, allowing both students and faculty to study advanced theological scholarship.[27]

Social Justice and Civil Rights Advocacy

The influence of Ellison on the School of Religion was beyond the academic aspects; he was a staunch advocate of social justice and civil rights. His leadership coincided with the 1940s and 1950s, when especially the Civil Rights Movement took center stage, and thus encouraged students and faculty to engage in activism that was informed by their theological training.[28]

Ellison believed that the church had a moral obligation to try to right issues of inequality and injustice, a conviction that shaped the mission of the School of Religion. Under Ellison's leadership and partnerships with local churches and community organizations, a hotbed for social change within the School of Religion occurred. He did not only train them as ministers, he prepared them to become pioneers of civil rights

[27] R. Drew Smith, "African American Clergy and Leadership in the Civil Rights Movement," *Journal of Religious Thought* 65, no. 3 (2010).

[28] Randall K. Burkett, *The Black Church in the United States: An Historical Overview* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1978), 112.

mobilization from within the respective congregations they were called upon to lead. That, if anything, captured poignantly the signature dual focus of Ellison's vision.[29]

The success of Dr. Ellison's leadership at the School of Religion can arguably be measured in terms of the successes of its graduates. Many of its graduates went on to high-ranking positions in the Civil Rights Movement, including pastors, educators, and community leaders. Ellison's emphasis on combining faith with activism prepared these leaders to respond effectively to the key issues of the day, from segregation to economic inequality.[30]

Ellison's impact began to reach even further into the broader African American church. The challenge of academic preparedness and theological heft brought new measures that other schools would need to meet when it came to preparing clergy. By enhancing the intellectual and social position of the School of Religion, Ellison ensured that Virginia Union would forever stand among the top theological training institutions.[31]

The gifts that Dr. John Malcus Ellison gave to the School of Religion at Virginia Union University were transformative and far-reaching. His leadership combined academic rigor, faith, and a commitment to social justice in a model for theological education that continues to inspire. Reforming the curriculum, raising the standards of the faculty, and championing social activism, Ellison redefined the role of the African American church for the twentieth century. His legacy lives on, however, in the success

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[29] Leroy Fitts, *A History of Black Baptist Theological Education in the United States* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2002), 65.

[30] Dwight Perry, *Breaking Down Barriers: A Black Evangelical Explains the Black Church* (Madison, NJ: Baker Publishing Group, 1998), 67.

[31] Henry H. Mitchell, *Black Preaching: The Recovery of a Powerful Art* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1993), 12.

of the graduates from Virginia Union and in the more general ripples his vision created in theological education and social advancement.

Dr. John Malcus Ellison personified what can be described as a transformational leader through his tireless efforts and devotion to academic excellence, social justice, and spiritual development. During his tenure as president of Virginia Union University, he introduced unprecedented stewardship toward the university's School of Religion, a new meaning, and definition in the purpose of theological education regarding equipping African American clergy and their respective communities during one of the most historical periods in America.[32] By placing the highest premium on intellectual rigor, Ellison put a standard on behalf of ministerial training such that its alumnae would be led to do little else than to lead active congregations for civil rights as well as serving in social reforms.[33] Reforms put into place pertaining to curriculum and faculty development, along with community interface programs, ultimately established the footprint by which it was ensured that it would become and continue to lead the nation and the world on how such an institution of learning could be molded.

Ellison's leadership went way beyond academic borders to make students and faculty alike realize that they, too, are deeply rooted in faith and activism as agents of change. Commitment to the transforming power of education was echoed in each and every facet of his work, hand in hand with a commitment to the cause of equality. As such, Ellison went on to change not only Virginia Union University but also the African

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[32] Perry, *Breaking Down Barriers*, 231.

[33] Carter G Woodson, *The Miseducation of the Negro* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, Inc., 1990), 55.

American Church and the Civil Rights Movement in ways that would be remembered for generations to come.

As historian Leroy Fitts astutely commented, "Ellison's administration bridged an intellectual preparation together with a sense of social responsibility by the Afro-American church that birthed yet another paradigm when theological depth moved into the justice front."[34] His legacy underlines at many levels that the transformative possibilities offered by visionary leadership become positively actual insofar as they are based upon experiences and lessons associated with commitment to communal uplift and concomitant drives toward justice. Dr. Ellison's legacy on the landscape of higher education and Virginia Union University indelibly lives within memory and spirit. The life and work of Dr. Ellison remind us of how education and faith force change for the betterment of all humankind. As Virginia Union University and its School of Religion remain in the vanguard to equip leaders to grapple with the challenges of the twenty-first century, the continued influence of Dr. Ellison's vision endures as light to guide forward.

The life and work of Dr. John Malcus Ellison embody the confluence in education, theology, and social justice to the rank of the key founder of religious education for African Americans. As the first African American president of Virginia Union University (VUU) and the transformative leader of the VUU School of Religion, Ellison profoundly influenced the intellectual and spiritual trajectory of the African American Church. His commitment to rigorous theological education, along with its integration into social and cultural relevance, made him redefine what divinity schools

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[34] Fitts, *A History of Black Baptist Theological Education*, 34.

could do in shaping not only clergy but the greater community of leaders and activists within the African American church.

Virginia Union University was founded during the Reconstruction Era to provide higher education to newly freed African Americans. By the time Ellison took over the presidency in 1941, the university was already considered an indispensable institution for advancing theological and academic pursuits among African Americans. However, Ellison's leadership of the School of Religion brought an element of depth and focus to its role as a training ground for spiritual and civic leaders.

Ellison's leadership coincided with a very transformational period in the African American church. During the mid-twentieth century, growing numbers of citizens began to question the entrenched status quo of racial segregation. The church could be the core institutional home base from which so much mobilizing and inspiration were being nurtured. Given these conditions, Ellison focused his call for an emphasis on a dual role: that of a spiritual shepherd as well as an advocate for social causes. He wanted training that was profound in theological nature but unmistakably linked with concerns of racial justice and community building.

Transformation of the School of Religion

One of the most important things Ellison brought to the Virginia Union University School of Religion was a demand for academic rigor and contextual theology. He believed that theological education should not only train ministers in traditional pastoral duties but also prepare them to address the unique challenges faced by African Americans in a segregated society. To this end, Ellison advocated a curriculum based on a strong

foundation in biblical studies, ethics, and pastoral care, with classes in social justice, economics, and public policy.

Ellison strongly emphasized cultural identity and heritage, especially in the theological discourse of African Americans. He insisted that people examine more about the traditions of Black preaching, gospel music, and liberation theologies, which had much to say directly about African Americans. Under his leadership, the School of Religion became a hotbed for what would later be called Black theology, a framework that puts the experiences and struggles of African Americans at the center of theological reflection.[35]

One hallmark of Ellison's impact was producing leaders who could think critically and act boldly. He envisioned ministers not in isolation but as catalysts for community empowerment. This would have had a ripple effect, as the graduates of the School of Religion carried on Ellison's vision into their respective congregations, communities, and larger social movements.[36]

Dr. Ellison's impact on the African American Church went far beyond the confines of Virginia Union University. His work influenced a generation of clergy who took leadership positions in the Civil Rights Movement and other causes aimed at social change. These clergy carried forward Ellison's commitment to the interrelationship between faith and justice, ensuring that the African American church remained a driving force for progress within American society.

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[35] Cone, *Theology of Black Liberation*, 138.

[36] Gayraud S. Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1983), 28.

Another one of the areas that elevated Ellison's view was in regard to education and intellectual engagement, thus giving higher stature within the wider Christian community to the African American church. The encouragement for theological scholarship dealing with complex issues regarding race, economics, and politics further situated the African American Church in leading debates regarding moral and ethical leadership. This is a legacy that can be seen in the life and work of figures such as Dr. Wyatt Tee Walker, a prominent civil rights leader and theologian who studied at Virginia Union University and represented an integration of theology and activism that Ellison championed.[37]

Legacy and Long-Term Impact

The long-term influence of Dr. John Malcus Ellison's leadership can be seen both in the continued prominence of the Virginia Union University School of Religion and the evolving role of the African American church in contemporary society. His insistence on academic excellence, cultural relevance, and social engagement laid the foundation for future theological innovations and leadership development.

Another sense in which Ellison's legacy endures has to do with the wider movement for the formalization and expansion of theological education among African Americans. Much of his principles, contextual theology, integrating faith with social justice and community empowerment have become part of the fabric of most HBCU divinity schools today. His work, thus underlined, had to make certain that training for the ministry was done not only in service to the congregations but also to challenge the unequal structures of society.

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[37] Raboteau, *Canaan Land,* 243.

Of even more significance, however, is Ellison's consistent vision for an African American spiritual and social ecclesiology and how a theological institution shapes those generations that followed Ellison among both clergy and laity alike. His paradigm has driven many contemporary issues relating to a twenty-first-century understanding of race, faith, and justice today, which again ensures that the African American Church continues to carry and present the critical voices toward all of these twenty-first-century moral and ethical challenges.[38]

Dr. John Malcus Ellison was a transformative leader whose impact on the Virginia Union University School of Religion and the African American Church can never be overstated. In his redefinition of theological education to include academic rigor combined with a commitment to social justice, Ellison helped shape a legacy of leadership that continues to mold the African American Church and its role in society. His work has been one of the many that have kept the church as a strong force in spiritual guidance and the transformation of society with the dual call to faith and justice at the heart of the Black religious tradition. In so doing, Ellison was positioned to shape not only a divinity school but also to chart a course for the future of the African American church as a beacon of hope, resilience, and liberation.[39]

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[38] Taylor, *Faith in the Fire,* 44.

[39] Cone, *Theology of Black Liberation*, 55.

CHAPTER FOUR

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

Renewal Theology is one of the most important movements in Christian theology, emphasizing the dynamic and renewing work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer and the church. In essence, Renewal Theology focuses on spiritual revival, manifestations of spiritual gifts, and renewal of persons and communities according to biblical standards. Renewal Theology is rooted in the scriptural promises of the Holy Spirit's empowering presence discussed in Acts 2:17–21 and is committed to leading people into an intimate relationship with God through personal and communal experiences of the Spirit.[1] The theological emphasis in Renewal Theology brings a dynamic, active faith, one of divine encounter, to often static or ritualistic forms of religion.

The historical roots of Renewal Theology go all the way back to the Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements of the twentieth century. Within the Pentecostal revival, which literally kicked off with events such as the Azusa Street Revival in Los Angeles between 1906 and 1915, a renewed interest in spiritual gifts, prophecy, healing, and speaking in tongues became more developed. Guided by personalities like William J. Seymour and Charles F. Parham, this movement ushered in a sea of change in modern

[1] Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 39.

Christianity.[2] This was further expanded in the Charismatic Renewal of the 1960s and 1970s into mainline denominations: Catholic, Anglican, and Lutheran traditions. The expansion, therefore, showed the appeal that Renewal Theology had across all boundaries.[3]

Renewal Theology has been at the forefront with regard to a renewal of spiritual practices and doctrines of modern Christianity. It has brought into the church a challenge for rethinking the role of the Holy Spirit regarding worship, mission, and discipleship. It has centered on the experiential dimension of faith and challenged believers to be open to spiritual power and life change. The global spread of Pentecostalism and Charismatic Christianity, especially in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, testifies that Renewal Theology is relevant to meeting spiritual hunger and the needs of society. As Harvey Cox says in Fire from Heaven, Pentecostalism is a spiritual revolution that meets the needs of people for a direct encounter with God in a rapidly changing world.[4]

This research will be based on the foundational principles, historical development, and contemporary implications of Renewal Theology. By engaging with the central themes of Renewal Theology, this chapter aims to demonstrate how such theology has shaped modern Christianity and continues to shape spiritual practices across the world today.[5] Among these are the major themes that Renewal Theology was based on: the

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[2] Larry Hart, *Truth Aflame: Theology for the Church in Renewal* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 149.

[3] Stanley M. Burgess and Gary B. McGee, eds., *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 66.

[4] Amos Yong, *Renewing Christian Theology: Systematic Theology for a Charismatic Church* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010), 179.

[5] Harvey Cox, *Fire from Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty-First Century* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1995), 31.

centrality of the Holy Spirit, active gifts, spiritual emphasis, and personal and communal renewal. It gives the grounds necessary for the understanding of its theological framework and how this theological paradigm is applied within many contexts.[6]

Renewal Theology developed significantly from the roots of the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements to global Christianity. Its historical trajectory shows how it could easily adapt and fit into the demands of time.[7] Renewal Theology has influenced worship, mission, and ecclesiology greatly. Centrality to the work of the Holy Spirit in these renewals gave vigor to the Church concerning divine empowerment and spiritual formation. This chapter presents a discussion on how Renewal Theology has influenced current Christian thought and practice to counter the challenges that the churches have in secularism and spiritual disconnection.[8]

This chapter will think out the core of Renewal Theology, which makes it a vital lens for understanding the continued work of the Holy Spirit in addressing personal and communal transformation in today's church. Vindicating the experiential and empowering Spirit, Renewal Theology has breathed newfound vigor into Christian spirituality and given many a theological paradigm with which to meet the challenges facing moderns.[9] Renewal Theology is more of a critical movement that has taken center in shaping the

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[6] Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 50.

[7] William Hordern, *A Layman's Guide to Protestant Theology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2002), 192.

[8] Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, “Renewal Theology as an Ecumenical Phenomenon,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 13, no. 2 (2004): 114.

[9] Owen C. Thomas and Ellen K. Wondra, *Introduction to Theology* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse, 2002), 37.

thought and practice of contemporary Christianity through spiritual renewal, manifestation of spiritual gifts, and the advancement of God's kingdom.[10]

Renewal Theology is a very significant movement within Christian thought. It is noted, among other things, for its high value of the Holy Spirit's dynamic and life-altering work in the lives of believers and the church. Thus, its historical development is deeply rooted in the Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements, respectively shaped by significant theological figures and integrated into the larger Christian tradition.[11]

Overview of Early Pentecostal Movements

It is now generally accepted that Pentecostalism emerged at the dawn of the twentieth century, placed on the Holy Spirit in relation to renewed emphasis, and especially the type of New Testament experience. A foundation experience of the Pentecostal movement is said to be the Azusa Street Revival in Los Angeles, starting in the year 1906 with their leader, William J. Seymour. This revival became a catalyst for the global spread of Pentecostalism. Such spiritual revival underlined the phenomena of speaking in tongues, prophecy, and healing. Emphasis on direct spiritual experiences has signified a break from the more traditional and highly liturgical forms of Christianity, which in turn encouraged immediacy with and a personal relationship with the divine.

By the mid-twentieth century, the Charismatic movement began influencing mainline Protestant and Roman Catholic denominations. Whereas Classical

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[10] Clark H. Pinnock, *Flame of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 79.

[11] Richard Quebedeaux, *The New Charismatics* (San Francisco, CA: Harper and Row, 1976), 34-36.

Pentecostalism mainly formed new denominations, the Charismatic Movement attempted to renew existing ones by introducing Pentecostal experiences and practices into them.[12] It also called all believers, regardless of denomination, to openness to spiritual gifts and the adoption of a more spontaneous, expressive form of worship. The charismatic use of the historic traditions tended to challenge established theological structures and invited a critical reconsideration of the role of the Holy Spirit in Christian living today.

Theological Contributions of Important Figures

William J. Seymour, a Black preacher, played a significant role in the Azusa Street Revival, which emphasized racial integration and the availability of the Holy Spirit's gifts. Charles F. Parham, often regarded as a founder of Pentecostalism, focused on speaking in tongues as evidence of the Holy Spirit's baptism. Kathryn Kuhlman, a major healing evangelist of the mid-twentieth century, drew attention to the miraculous elements of the Holy Spirit's work and influenced both Pentecostal and Charismatic circles.[13] These figures, among others, contributed to shaping the practice of Renewal Theology, especially in theological emphases such as experiential faith and accessibility to spiritual gifts.[14]

Scholars such as Amos Yong and Jürgen Moltmann have been important contributors to the academic development of Renewal Theology. The work of Amos Yong

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[12] Alexander Souter, *A Pocket Lexicon to the Greek New Testament* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1917), 43.

[13] F. Steve Echols, England Allen, and Dockery David, *Catastrophic Crisis; Ministry Leadership in the Midst of Trial and Tragedy* (Nashville, TN: B and H Publishing, 2011), 78.

[14] J. Rodman Williams, *Renewal Theology: Systematic Theology from a Charismatic Perspective,* vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 38-40.

fuses Pentecostal spirituality within a wider theological and philosophical discourse with an acute accent on the role of the Holy Spirit within both interfaith dialogues and a world Christianity context. Jürgen Moltmann's theology of hope and his emphasis on the eschatological Spirit provided key interpretive frameworks for engaging with Renewal Theology within the context of Systematic Theology[15]. Their contributions have helped to legitimize and deepen the intellectual foundations of the movement, mending the gap between experiential faith and academic discourse. Renewal Theology has outgrown its Pentecostal roots into a force across Christian traditions around the world. Evangelicalism has wrought a reconsideration of the role of the Holy Spirit and a far more charismatic worship expression in many congregations.[16] More self-consciously still, the Charismatic Renewal received recognition and endorsement in the Roman Catholic Church from the church leadership itself, in that charismatic practices found their place in traditional liturgy and sacramental life. Theologically, Renewal Theology has made its home in the global South, meaning Africa, Asia, and Latin America, where the emphasis on an experiential and transforming Holy Spirit in Renewal Theology matches native spiritualities and social contexts. This widespread integration underlines the adaptability and relevance of Renewal Theology across diverse cultural and theological landscapes.[17]

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[15] Simpson, *Modern Christian Theology*, 218.

[16] Frank D. Macchia, *Baptized in the Spirit: A Global Pentecostal Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 42.

[17] Jürgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1992), 59.

Renewal Theology is representative of one of the most important movements within Christian thought. In this movement, attention is placed on the dynamic and transformative work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers and in the church. Its historical development is deeply rooted in the Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements, shaped by key theological personalities, and integrated into the broader Christian traditions.

Overview of Early Pentecostal Movements

The early twentieth century saw the rise of Pentecostalism, a movement that put new emphasis on the experiences of the Holy Spirit, as described in the New Testament. One of the key events of this movement was the Azusa Street Revival, beginning in 1906 in Los Angeles, led by William J. Seymour. That revival was to become the catalyst that gave Pentecostalism a global spread by emphasizing speaking in tongues, prophecy, and healing. Emphasizing direct spiritual experiences took one away from the more traditional and liturgical ways of Christianity; it was a means of creating immediacy and personal contact with the divine.

The Charismatic movement thus began to influence the mainline Protestant and Roman Catholic denominations by the mid-twentieth century. It differed from classical Pentecostalism in that the latter mostly consisted of new denominations, whereas the Charismatic movement sought to renew existing ones by introducing Pentecostal experiences and practices.[18] It states that spiritual gifts were available for all believers of

[18] James M. Kouzes, and Barry Z. Posner, *Christian Reflections on the Leadership Challenge* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2006), 32.

any denomination and introduced an informal, expressive worship style. The charismatic practices introduced into the established traditions caused theological frameworks to be challenged and rethought regarding the role of the Holy Spirit in Christian life today.[19]

To the Azusa Street Revival, the contribution of William J. Seymour, an African American preacher, was insistence on racial integration and the universality of the Holy Spirit's gifts. Charles F. Parham is considered one of the main proponents among the founders of Pentecostalism, laying great stress on speaking in tongues as evidence of the Holy Spirit's baptism. Among the key healing evangelists of the mid-twentieth century was Kathryn Kuhlman, who drew attention to the Holy Spirit's work in miraculous ways that influenced both Pentecostal and Charismatic circles. These figures, along with many others, contributed to the shaping of the practices and theological emphases of Renewal Theology, especially in their focus on experiential faith and the accessibility of spiritual gifts.[20]

Among the many scholars, Renewal Theology has been discussed, but two most influential works can be those of Amos Yong and Jürgen Moltmann. The work of Amos Yong integrates Pentecostal spirituality within larger theological and philosophical discussions, highlighting the Holy Spirit's role in interfaith dialogue and global Christianity.[21] The most important thing in Jürgen Moltmann's theology of hope, in that respect, and his emphasis on the eschatological work of the Spirit, was to provide a

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[19] Dunn, "Renewal Theology: An Evangelical Appraisal," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 9, no. 13 (1996).

[20] Simon Chan, *Pentecostal Theology and the Christian Spiritual Tradition* (Sheffield: UK Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 128.

[21] Thielman, *Ephesians,* 46.

framework in which Renewal Theology could be set within systematic theology.[22] Their contributions helped to validate and deepen the intellectual underpinnings of the movement, mending the gap between faith experience and academia.

Influence on Evangelicalism, Catholicism, and Global Christianity Renewal Theology has outgrown its Pentecostal roots by influencing a myriad of Christian expressions around the globe. The result of Evangelicalism has been a reevaluation of the role of the Holy Spirit, while the expression of worship has become alive and much more charismatic for many congregations. Within Roman Catholicism, the Charismatic Renewal was welcomed, even embraced by the hierarchy of the church, so that charismatic expressions found a place in harmony with traditional liturgy and sacramental life. Theologically, Renewal Theology has reached a fertile climate of reception and has taken root, particularly in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Its insistently experiential and transformative stress on the Holy Spirit's operations does resonate congenially with those spiritualities of indigenous provenance, along with corresponding social contexts. Such wide-ranging assimilation underlines something about the adaptability of and relevance that the Renewal Theology will bear across diverse cultural and theological landscapes.[23]

Renewal Theology represents a dynamic and developing interest in Christian thought that puts great emphasis on the active, transforming Holy Spirit within the life of believers and the larger church community. Centrally rooted in this theological framework are the following themes: the centrality of the Holy Spirit, renewal and

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[22] Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation,* 89.

[23] Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 128.

sanctification as a process, eschatological understanding of the Kingdom of God, and the imperativeness of mission and evangelism. These are aspects now explored in this chapter, as it brings their theological significance into practical view.[24]

At the heart of Renewal Theology is a strong pneumatology, or study of the Holy Spirit. This emphasis underlines the conviction that the Holy Spirit is indeed at work in the world, leading, empowering, and changing people and groups. It insists that the New Testament experiences of the early church are normative for today's Christian life, which demands a constant openness to the Spirit's leading and manifestations.[25]

Renewal Theology places a great emphasis on the charismata, the spiritual gifts in their concrete manifestation of the Holy Spirit at work. Gifts such as prophecy, healing, and speaking in tongues should not be merely historical phenomena but real occurrences serving the edification of the church. Such a position would make the believer pursue these gifts and practice them, whereby the Spirit's power would show presence and transformation in the community of believers.[26]

Renewal Theology's core doctrine is the baptism of the Holy Spirit. This experience is considered to be separate from conversion and empowering in nature, usually evidenced by speaking in tongues. It equips believers for service, witness, and a deeper spiritual life. While the theological interpretations differ, the common factor in all of them is the personal experience with the Holy Spirit that causes a person to be more

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[24] Yong, *Renewing Christian Theology*, 145.

[25] Andrew Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 93.

[26] Williams, *Renewal Theology: Systematic Theology from a Charismatic Perspective*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 19-22.

conscious of God's presence and mission.[27] According to Renewal Theology, in one sanctification process, which is not instantaneous but dynamic, transformation into Christ's likeness keeps on taking place because of the ministry or effort carried on in their heart by the Holy Spirit.

Being dynamic, not static, renews a set of experiences one must meet, rejuvenating personal faith and ethical conduct. Through enabling assistance, personal sanctity would seem to be bestowed as both promise and calling enabled by His life within them. It provides the resources essential for responding to His forgiving justness and the Spirit's power toward holiness living.

The concepts of renewal and sanctification are here integrated into a single theological thought: the concept of renewing or infilling, fresh in time, an experience where a Christian is empowered afresh through new infillings with the Holy Spirit, and the Spirit continues on the path to holiness. Further, overcoming the forces of sin into virtue again emphasizes that renovation requires the operation of the Spirit repeatedly throughout one's life.[28]

Renewal Theology espouses the eschatological framework frequently referred to as "already but not yet." It recognizes God's kingdom as having been inaugurated in Christ, even while it remains yet to come in fullness. It fosters urgency and hope as believers are called to join God's redemptive work now, while it will be consummated in the future.[29]

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[27] Clark H. Pinnock, *Flame of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 38.

[28] Horton, *The Christian Faith,* 142.

[29] Macchia, *Baptized in the Spirit: A Global Pentecostal Theology,* 37.

Believers understand the Holy Spirit as a primary agent for continuing God's work in this world. He does so by empowering believers, manifesting spiritual gifts, effecting personal and social change, and aligning the world to God's will. Such an active role challenges the church at this juncture to be an agent through which the Spirit operates in the interest of justice, peace, and reconciliation.[30]

Mand Evangelism Spirit-Empowered Missions and the Global Extension of Christianity

The emphasis on renewal underscores the indispensable role of the Holy Spirit in mission and evangelism. The Spirit commissions witnesses to deal boldly, to work miracles, signs, and wonders, and to cross all geographical and linguistic boundaries for the Gospel. This energizes the rapid Pentecostal and charismatic movements in the Global South. Renewal Theology is a gospel that transforms societies beyond the individual conversion. Renewal Theology is one that also calls for a change in society through the gospel. It holds that the Holy Spirit changes not just hearts but also systemic ills like poverty, injustice, and oppression. In its promotion of social action with evangelism, Renewal Theology is a manifesto of God's kingdom values in every sphere of life.[31]

Renewal Theology has shaped modern Christianity, from church practices and theological debates to how the church interacts with society. This theological movement emphasizes the Holy Spirit's active and transformative work, having huge implications for worship styles, spiritual gifts, and the church's role in addressing societal issues. As

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[30] Grudem, *Systematic Theology,* 22.

[31] Pinnock, *Flame of Love,* 46.

much as Renewal Theology has brought vitality and growth to the Christian communities, it has faced its own level of critiques and controversies. This, therefore, calls for careful reflection upon both the practices and theology grounding such a movement.[32]

Renewal Theology has shaped the worship and prayer practices of contemporary Christianity, especially in the direct and personal experience of the Holy Spirit. The music may be loud, and prophetic words are proclaimed; prayers for healing are conducted, and people speak in tongues has often characterized the Renewal churches, which stress charismata. This style gives a worshipping congregation an experiential and participatory feel. As Harvey Cox writes in *Fire from Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty-First Century,* the emotive and participatory dimensions of Renewal Theology are most attractive to those seeking an immediate experience of God. These types of practices also transcend cultural and linguistic boundaries more often than not, which makes them especially appealing in pluralistic and global settings. Some critics say this practice risks overemphasizing emotionalism at the expense of theological depth.[33] Renewal Theology has found fertile ground within the Global South, where Christianity is rapidly expanding. In fact, cultural values and socio-economic realities in regions like Africa, Asia, and Latin America are greatly in line with an emphasis on spiritual empowerment and healing.[34]

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[32] Yong, *Renewing Christian Theology,* 19.

[33] Macchia, *Baptized in the Spirit: A Global Pentecostal Theology*, 33.

[34] John MacArthur, *Strange Fire: The Danger of Offending the Holy Spirit with Counterfeit Worship* (Nashville, TN: Nelson Books, 2013), 212.

Andrew Walls discusses in *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History* how Pentecostal and Charismatic movements throughout the regions combine indigenous culture with their form of worship. It addresses not only spiritual needs but bodily and social ones, hence why the movement is growing explosively. The blending of Renewal Theology with local traditions did at times pose theological challenges to the movement, the two most common being syncretism and doctrinal deviation.[35]

A very prevalent critique of Renewal Theology has to do with its tendencies toward sensationalism and doctrinal imbalance. Detractors insist that too great an emphasis on spiritual manifestations like healings and tongues might diminish the centrality of the gospel and the teachings of scripture.[36]

Simon Chan, in *Pentecostal Theology and the Christian Spiritual Tradition*, suggests that whereas Renewal Theology enriches Christian spirituality, it does not have to fall into the pitfalls of elevating experiences above sound doctrine as normative. He seeks balance between the experiential and theological, requiring Renewal movements to find their secure grounding in the Bible. This critique underlines an aspect of what is needed: renewal of discernment and accountability within the churches of Renewal.[37]

The focus of Renewal Theology on spontaneity and the gifts of the Spirit has produced conflicts between them and the historic denominations. This is because liturgical churches will contrast with the organized form of worship against the Renewal

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[35] Andrew Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 49.

[36] James Dunn, "Renewal Theology: An Evangelical Appraisal," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 9, no. 13 (1996).

[37] Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, "Renewal Theology as an Ecumenical Phenomenon," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 13, no. 2 (2004).

movement that is free-flowing and emotive in worship style. This is apart from the more theological differences regarding the use of the Holy Spirit.

In his work "Renewing Christian Theology," Amos Yong argues that Renewal Theology assumes a new attitude based on pneumatology. However, its expressions respectfully converse with or reflect upon the standard forms. Further conversation between these renewal movements and other traditional groupings could lead to increased mutual exchange, further deepening the theological expression within the streams themselves.

Renewal Theology and Its Contribution to Questions of Justice, Poverty, and Social Transformation

It is not only spiritual renewal that Renewal Theology addresses, but it also involves the aspect of social transformation. Its holistic mission includes issues related to poverty, injustice, and systemic oppression. This is deeply rooted in the belief that the Holy Spirit empowers believers for spiritual growth, as well as for societal change.[38]

Frank Macchia, in his work, *Baptized in the Spirit: A Global Pentecostal Theology,* relates Spirit's empowerment with sociopolitical engagement. "Here, Renewal Theology integration is possible to achieve between the evangelistic efforts and engagements brought out with the social issues of humankind and necessarily requires Christians to agonize for life in the likeness of the Kingdom of God that would become

[38] Chan, *Pentecostal Theology and the Christian Spiritual Tradition*, 61.

real part of humanity."[39] This spiritual-societal orientation for renewal theology would distinguish this stream from various others in theology.[40]

Renewal Theology has also made contributions to the interfaith dialogue and ecumenical movements. Through the emphasis on the Holy Spirit's unifying work, Renewal leaders have encouraged cooperation among the different Christian traditions and reached out to other faith communities. In *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation,* Jürgen Moltmann gives an exposition of the Holy Spirit's universal work and its implications for the dialogue between Christians and other religious groups. The pneumatological thrust of Renewal Theology supplies a common concern in which it can address issues like peacemaking and responsible care of Earth with others. All this openness has, however, raised the question of the ability to uphold doctrinal particularity and theological boundaries.

Renewal Theology continues to shape contemporary Christianity in its profoundly modernizing influence on worship, its grappling with theological and cultural challenges, and its commitment to social justice joined to evangelism. It has certainly given vibrancy and added constituency to many Christian expressions, but it does not happen without the critique that points out the real need for theological discernment and balance. The focus on the Holy Spirit's active work in Renewal Theology will continue to shape its future with implications both encouraging and challenging for the global church to spiritual dynamism coupled with social involvement.[41]

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[39] Frederick C. Tiffany and Sharon H. Ringe, *Biblical Interpretation: A Roadmap* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996), 234.

[40] Yong, *Renewing Christian Theology: Systematic Theology for a Charismatic Church,* 18.

[41] Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History,* 19.

The theology of Renewal has greatly impacted modern Christianity in many movements, manifesting itself in practically all denominations. This chapter analyzes the main movements and leading personalities of contemporary Renewal Theology, examining its current shape and its effects on certain mainline denominations, such as Pentecostals and the Catholic Charismatic Renewal.[42]

Although the Hillsong Church, however, started in Sydney, Australia, it somehow managed to enter the world from a global perspective, especially through its music exposure. Hillsong Worship has written numerous top songs sung by congregations in every nation, contributing to the development of contemporary worship movements. However, critical voices have continuously questioned Hillsong's theological underpinnings and commodity approach to the worship of God himself.[43]

Another highly influential movement within Renewal Theology is Bethel Church in Redding, California, under Bill Johnson's leadership. Bethel is known for elaborating on supernatural experiences, such as healing and prophecies. It also greatly contributes to music, which is labeled Bethel Music. Theological deviance and encouragement toward the prosperity gospel are some major concerns raised by Bethel regarding criticisms.[44]

The Vineyard Movement, founded by John Wimber, is basically characterized by intimate worship and the exercising of spiritual gifts. Local churches within the Vineyard Movement have become notable for their effort to balance the Word and the Spirit in worship, making it accessible to the people. The movement, while it has grown, has also

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[42] Quebedeaux, *The New Charismatics*, 37.

[43] Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way*, 98.

[44] Macchia, *Baptized in the Spirit: A Global Pentecostal Theology,* 135.

experienced some mishaps, one of which was when the so-called "mother church," Vineyard Anaheim, recently disassociated, causing resultant discussions about the future direction and unity of the movement.[45]

Renewal Theology has deeply impacted one of the largest Pentecostal denominations in the world: the Assemblies of God (AG). The AG places great emphasis on baptism in the Holy Spirit and encourages its members to exercise spiritual gifts like speaking in tongues, prophecy, and healing. Partly because of this, the denomination has grown and is very active in missions around the world. However, this has not been without internal and external challenges. Internally, there have been debates over the proper expression of spiritual gifts and the need for doctrinal soundness. Externally, the AG has had to work out its identity within the larger evangelical community, balancing its Pentecostal distinctive with a desire for broader Christian unity.

Renewal Influences within Catholic Charismatic Renewal and Evangelicalism

The Catholic Charismatic Renewal (CCR) had its inception in the late 1960s due to Pentecostal spirituality. The CCR also aimed at renewal through the Holy Spirit at a personal level through experiences like speaking in tongues and healing. The CCR received recognition from the Catholic Church and eventually resulted in a large number of prayer groups and communities all over the world. In Evangelicalism, Renewal Theology has caused charismatic expressions to manifest in traditionally non-charismatic

[45] Kärkkäinen, “Renewal Theology as an Ecumenical Phenomenon,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 13, no. 2 (2004).

denominations, such as the adoption of contemporary worship styles and openness to spiritual gifts.[46]

Renewal Theology has certainly contributed in its own right to a focus on the active work of the Holy Spirit in a very vital way to current Christian thought and practice. While moving into the future, several emerging trends, challenges, and opportunities will shape its course. Renewal Theology has also embraced this change. For instance, many churches and ministries are now creating an online presence to reach people. Virtual church services, prayer groups online, and discipleship now have become the new norm not just because of compelling events like COVID-19 but also as an organic extension to online outreach and community that could be done in real-time. On the other hand, this raises several questions with respect to communal worship and theological dilution in online space.[47] It takes more and more cultural forms with the global growth of Christianity, particularly in the Global South. Local traditions and cultural contexts are increasingly shaping the practice and interpretation of Renewal Theology in many regions of Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

This multicultural growth enriches the theological panorama, but it also presents challenges to maintaining doctrine coherence across diverse cultural contexts. Continuing dialogue between indigenous practice and Renewal Theology will be necessary to maintain theological integrity while avoiding cultural sensitivity.[48]

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[46] Yong, *Renewing Christian Theology: Systematic Theology for a Charismatic Church*, 112.

[47] MacArthur, *Strange Fire*, 99.

[48] Grudem, *Systematic Theology,* 187.

Secularism and skepticism regarding religious structures in many Western cultures are growing strong. Renewal Theology finds a difficult position with regard to being able to advance this message within such a context where traditional religious narratives can regularly be held as a suspect. There could be only careful engagement in contexts that were secular by bringing the thoughts that concerned the minds and interests of each modern citizen and showing them Renewal Theology at work in the context. This reevaluation might consist of the rephrasing of theological input into speech with which the secular could more easily identify or debunk common myths associated with the movement.[49]

A signature of Renewal Theology is to emphasize personal spiritual experiences, such as speaking in tongues, prophecy, and healing. As much as these experiences may deepen one's faith, there is a risk of elevating subjective experiences over established theological doctrines. It is important that personal experiences be subject to scriptural teachings to avoid doctrinal errors. This balance requires robust theological education and discernment within Renewal communities if orthodoxy is to be maintained with the dynamic work of the Holy Spirit.[50]

Renewal Theology has potential to bridge the generation and cultural gap in Christianity because it is an experiential type of theology. Renewal Theology is sure to attract more and more people along a wide spectrum, particularly among the younger generation seeking authenticity in spiritual experience. Given its nature and ability to set itself into a wide variety of contexts, it has the ability to stand as a bridge between

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[49] Horton, *The Christian Faith,* 145.

[50] Macchia, *Baptized in the Spirit,* 67.

cultures and customs within Christianity. Renewal Theology will, therefore, bridge the gap across generational and cultural divides to unity and understanding by building communities that treasure varied expressions of faith in an inclusive manner. It is this bridging role that places Renewal Theology in a position where it can foster broader ecclesiastical renewal and cooperation. Renewal Theology shapes the future because it is responsive to what is developing, a theology able to address the current challenging trends and open to new opportunities. Continuing to engage digital platforms, utilizing multicultural expressions, being thoughtfully engaging with secular perspectives, theologically astute, and bridging the divides across the Christian landscape, Renewal Theology is well placed to continue to flourish and make its living contribution to the global church. Inherent in the thrust of Renewal toward the active presence of the Holy Spirit is a dynamic and flexible framework for faith in the twenty-first century.[51]

Conclusion

The future of Renewal Theology is bright, especially in how it will respond to emerging trends and address the challenges of a rapidly changing world. As digital ministry and online renewal communities continue to expand, Renewal Theology will reach new audiences and create innovative spaces for spiritual engagement.

These digital platforms afford unparalleled opportunities for disseminating the gospel, mobilizing prayer networks around the world, and providing Renewal Theology with the most accessibility to discipleship resources at any point in history. Moreover, the multiculturalism emphasized in the movement is in step with the increasingly diverse and

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[51] Williams, *Renewal Theology,* 50.

interrelated global church. Accordingly, Renewal Theology embraces faith in its various cultural expressions, thus providing the potential to cross over different traditions and close some gaps in both generational and cultural understandings to allow for a united Christianity that is in collaboration. There are, however, some serious challenges associated with Renewal Theology: to have to wrestle with a good degree of secularism and skepticism in the West. The leaders of renewal will have to articulate their theology in terms relevant to modern ears and show how the work of the Holy Spirit is practically relevant to individual and social needs. Renewal leaders will have to articulate their theology in terms relevant to modern ears and show how the Holy Spirit's work is practically relevant to the needs of individuals and society.

Moreover, the movement has to work out how to celebrate spiritual experiences without compromising theological rigor, maintaining its practices in sound biblical teachings.

Renewal Theology offers hope to the global church due to its strong emphasis on the Holy Spirit as a real, current, and transformative presence. This fires up a belief without borders, a calling that pursues authentic faith and lives beyond culture and denomination into the establishment of communities characterized by worship, justice, and mission. The flexibility of renewal theology, with its emphasis on holistic transformation, prominently positions it in relation to the church's response to the challenges of the twenty-first century[52].

Through an active and engaged interaction both with critics and adherents, Renewal Theology further refines its practice with a contribution that keeps growing for

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[52] Gilbert R. Rendle, *Leading Change in the Congregation: Spiritual and Organizational Tools for Leaders* (Bethesda, MD: The Alban Press, 1999), 56.

the broader theological conversation. Its maturity will be in a place of unique bent: not only the continuance in growth but a facilitator towards renewal in all arms of Christianity. Renewal Theology reminds the church that faith is not static but dynamic; it is a journey that is continually effecting change by the Holy Spirit. It is herein that the continuing relevance of Renewal Theology will be found: to take on new contexts yet remain true to the central elements of the gospel. As the global church continues to envision this, so too will Renewal Theology inspire, challenge, and resource believers toward a dynamic and Spirit-empowered faith that will speak to today's world.

CHAPTER FIVE

INTERDISCIPLINARY FOUNDATIONS

The core of leadership is very central to organizational success, especially for institutions that have their roots in community engagement and service, such as African American churches. These churches have served much more than as places of worship; they have been centers of social change, community cohesion, and resilience in the face of systemic challenges.[1] For such institutions to thrive amidst contemporary complexities, transformational leadership is emerging as a vital model. This style of leadership seeks to inspire people and enable them to work together in the pursuit of a shared vision, which fits the mission-oriented nature of faith-based organizations.

This chapter discusses transformational leadership and its interdependent relationship with strategic planning within African American churches. We seek to highlight its relevance by examining the theory's core principles, its application in organizational settings, and its capacity for driving meaningful change. Furthermore, the chapter intends to shed light on how transformational leadership, coupled with deliberate

[1] John Maxwell, *The Twenty-One Irrefutable Laws of Leadership* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1998), 139.

strategic planning, positions African American churches to meet unique challenges while increasing their impact on society.[2]

For generations, African American churches have stood as beacons of faith and centers of activity for crusades against social injustice, education, and the preservation of culture. Church-based efforts have led to rallying communities in which civil rights have been advocated and struggles for systemic injustice are sought. In light of this, contemporary demands on the shifting landscape of religious affiliation, generational shifts, and economic challenges put the need to engage in new kinds of innovative leadership and operating strategies. According to research, churches that have a strong strategic plan have a higher rate of retention in membership, a greater impact on the community, and even better economic health.[3] Thus, the involvement of African American Churches in incorporating the principles of transformational leadership into the planning process creates better preparation for challenges such as declining attendance and resource constraints.[4]

The complexity of these issues has brought to the fore a very effective model of leadership—transformational leadership. The transformational leadership style inspires the motivation of followers to achieve a shared vision, cultivate personnel development, and encourage innovation. Coupled with strategic planning, this kind of leadership has the potential to position African American churches to adapt to modern challenges while

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[2] Joshua L. Mitchell, *Black Millennials and the Church: Meet Me Where I Am* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2018), 121.

[3] Jeff Evans, *Inspirational Presence: The Art of Transformational Leadership* (Garden City NY: Morgan James Publishing, 2009), 293.

[4] Bernard M. Bass and Ronald E. Riggio, *Transformational Leadership* (New York, NY: Psychology Press, 2006), 12.

remaining culturally and spiritually relevant. The purpose of this chapter is to describe and discuss the influence of four main principles of transformational leadership, namely idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration, on strategic planning within African American churches. Transformational leadership can be characterized as one that has its core in meaningful change through inspiration, vision, and personal development. The following four principles are the backbone of this kind of leadership style and find special relevance in African American churches.

Idealized Influence

Idealized Influence is an elemental part of transformational leadership that focuses on the leader being a moralistic role model from which inspiration of trust and admiration from followers may be derived. Leaders exhibiting idealized influence demonstrate integrity, uphold high moral standards, and articulate a compelling vision.[5] This principle holds particular significance in African American churches, where clergy are often regarded as both spiritual and community leaders.[6]

Transformational leaders leverage idealized influence on command respect and loyalty by leading by example. Such leaders embody the values and principles they advocate, and their actions reflect a commitment to the collective good. In church

[5] Robert D. Dale, *Pastoral Leadership* (Nashville, TN: Abington Press, 1986), 87.

[6] Bass and Riggio, *Transformational Leadership*, 21.

settings, this often manifests as promoting social justice, supporting underserved communities, and fostering unity among congregants.[7]

One ingredient of idealized influence is to inspire confidence in followers. Confidence comes from the leader's credibility and actions that are congruent with their stated values. Idealized influence for African American clergy is to confront social ills, including racial discrimination, economic deprivation, and social injustice. By so doing, they demonstrate their commitment to the community's collective well-being.[8]

Historically, African American Churches reflect idealized influence through their leaders who created social movements for change. An example of this could be taken from the past in the work that Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. provided, applying his moral influence to catalyze the Civil Rights Movement. His faith-based ideals of equality and consistent commitment to ethical conduct eventually inspired nonviolent resistance to inequity.[9] Modern examples include clergy that lead initiatives on poverty or disparities in mental health in underserved communities. It is through idealized influence that these leaders focus on the needs of their congregations and ensure the moral vision stays clear in all decision-making processes. By setting a good example, transformational leaders establish trust and credibility that help bind congregations together in pursuit of common objectives. This approach also aligns with the traditional role that African American

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[7] Roger Smith, *Leadership and Growth in Faith-Based Organizations: A Case Study Approach* (Washington, DC: Unpublished manuscript, 2020), 54.

[8] Bass and Riggio, *Transformational Leadership*, 28.

[9] Burns, *Leadership,* 36.

churches have played within their communities: moral guides that helped build resilience and hope in the context of systemic challenges facing them.[10]

Inspirational Motivation

Inspirational Motivation refers to the degree to which leaders articulate a compelling vision that mobilizes and energizes followers. Leaders perceived to possess this trait communicate high expectations while instilling a sense of purpose, thus inspiring their teams to accomplish shared goals. This is particularly effective in African American churches, where leaders often use vision and motivational communication to unify congregations in collective action.[11]

Inspirational leaders excel in communicating a vision that deeply resonates with their followers. They do so with clarity and charisma, employing emotionally charged language to convey their goals and inspire commitment. This approach fosters optimism, enabling followers to reframe challenges as opportunities rather than obstacles. In African American Churches, inspirational motivation often takes the form of sermons and teachings that uplift congregants and instill hope and a sense of purpose.

A hallmark of inspirational motivation is the ability to align the leader's vision with the followers' values and aspirations. By linking organizational goals to individual motivations, leaders ensure that followers feel personally invested in the success of the collective mission. According to Bass and Riggio, this alignment is evident in African

[10] Bass and Riggio, *Transformational Leadership*, 59.

[11] Bass and Riggio, *Transformational Leadership,* 62.

American churches, where the spiritual and community benefits of initiatives such as social justice campaigns or youth mentoring programs are emphasized.[12]

Historically, inspirational motivation has been a defining characteristic of African American church leaders as they rallied their congregations around transformative causes. Leaders such as Reverend Ralph Abernathy and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. were pivotal figures during the Civil Rights Movement. Their ability to articulate a vision of equality and justice inspired millions. King's iconic "I Have a Dream" speech exemplifies inspirational motivation, vividly portraying a better future and galvanizing collective action.[13]

Pastors inspire such motivation in people on contemporary issues at the community level, such as mental health, economic empowerment, or education, to congregationally involve themselves in the solution process. The pastors, through much passion in preaching, telling stories, and personal engagement, inspire the congregants to take up their roles in achieving the shared goals. Inspirational Motivation stands as one part of the qualities of transformational leadership, those which equip the leader to inspire and unite their followers. This is the principle on which many African American churches have based their initiatives for social change, spiritual growth, and community empowerment. Through the articulation of a compelling vision, church leaders foster a sense of shared purpose that urges congregations to transcend these challenges and look toward a brighter future.[14]

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[12] Bass and Riggio, *Transformational Leadership*, 65.

[13] Cheryl Townsend Gilkes, *If It Wasn't for the Women: Black Women's Experience and Womanist Culture in Church and Community* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001), 35.

[14] Lincoln, and Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience*, 68.

Inspiration mobilizes others where a vision would be articulated. This is something inspirational expressions generate strongly among followers, generally driven by a passion for results and optimism because of the view placed on them.[15] Their inspirational messages articulate long-standing appeals by African American Churches to drive their congregations to galvanize around themes of community issues pertaining to uplift or crusades on purely social causes as well.[16] Classic uses were sermons entailing hopes along with perseverance such that the congregation would be there to encourage any generation via collective action it undergoes.

In the modern context, inspirational motivation can be leveraged to address challenges such as declining membership or waning engagement.[17] By crafting a vision that resonates with the community's needs and aspirations, church leaders can inspire renewed commitment and participation. This principle is particularly effective when integrated into strategic planning processes, ensuring that the church's goals are both meaningful and achievable.[18]

Intellectual Stimulation is an important factor of transformational leadership, emphasizing the creativity, innovation, and critical thinking that followers should receive. The leaders who evidence intellectual stimulation are those who enable their teams to question assumptions, consider new ideas, and find different solutions to different

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[15] Nohria Nitin, *Rakesh Khurana Handbook of Leadership Theory and Practice* (Cambridge MA: Harvard Business School Publishing, 2010), 98.

[16] C. Eric Lincoln, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990), 112.

[17] James E. Means, *Leadership in Christian Ministry* (Ada, NJ: Baker Books, 1989), 221.

[18] L. Richard Daft, *The Leadership Experience* (Springfield, OH: Thompson-Southwestern, 2008), 58.

problems. It is through valuing intellectual growth that these leaders help followers develop the capacities and confidence that will enable them to adapt to changing circumstances. Equally, intellectual stimulation is important within African American Churches as their pastors work through evolving society and technological advancement to keep the relevance of that church alive.[19]

One of the most critical aspects of intellectual stimulation is a leader's ability to question traditional norms while creating an environment of respect and cooperation. Transformational leaders encourage followers to think out of the box, which enables them to help find new solutions to complex problems.[20] For instance, African American church leaders might come up with new ways of worship, community outreach, and technology as ways to involve the younger audiences, allowing for greater participation. By constantly developing intellectually, this would enable congregants to play an active role in contributing to the way forward of the church and to promote a sense of personal effectiveness and commitment to shared goals.[21]

Another important aspect of intellectual stimulation is the promotion of problem-solving and innovation. Transformational leaders are concerned not only with solving current problems but also with equipping their organizations to predict and solve future ones. This has been a very important principle in the African American church during crises like the COVID-19 pandemic. Many churches welcomed live-streamed services and virtual community events, showing intellectual stimulation by adapting to

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[19] Lincoln and Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience*, 88.

[20] Bass and Riggio, *Transformational Leadership,* 129.

[21] Jackson Carrol and Becky R. McMillan, *God's Potters: Pastoral Leadership and the Shaping of Congregations* (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006), 32.

unprecedented disruptions so quickly and with such efficacy. By cultivating an environment of innovation and adaptation, church leaders ensure that their institutions continue to thrive and grow for the long term.[22]

Transformational leaders promote innovation and critical thinking by questioning the old norms and infusing the problem-solving culture.[23] The principle will, therefore, be significant in African American Churches to solve some emerging issues in contemporary society such as changed priorities and changes in worship and community involvement through technology.

Individualized Consideration

Individualized Consideration is the core component of transformational leadership whereby the leader shows a great deal of interest in the personal growth, needs, and wishes of his followers. Leaders who possess this kind of leadership quality are mentors and coaches; they consider the feelings of others, and thus their guidelines will always be relevant according to each one's condition.[24] Thus, this approach will make your followers have a sense of belonging, be empowered, and be more committed to the organization's cause. Within African American churches, individualized consideration is

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[22] Bass and Riggio, *Transformational Leadership*, 33.

[23] Greg Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship: Making Disciples a Few at a Time* (Chicago, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 132.

[24] Stephen Covey, *Principle Centered Leadership* (New York, NY: Free Press, 1991), 19; Daly, John, Judith A. Pauley, and Joseph F. Pauley, *Communication: The Key to Effective Leadership* (Milwaukee WN: Quality Press, 2009), 54.

expressed through pastoral care, mentorship programs, and other intentional means to meet the spiritual and personal needs of those in the congregation.[25]

One of the most important features of individualized consideration is that leaders can truly appreciate the different kinds of talents, problems, and contributions their followers possess.[26] The transformational leader does not adopt a single approach to all but rather deals on an individual level to comprehend the strengths a person possesses to help reach his or her full potential. An African American church leader might mentor a young congregant interested in ministry, leading and giving them opportunities to preach, organize events, or engage the community.[27] It is through such development of the persons that leaders ensure their organizations are found on a good foundation of able and inspired members.[28]

Another significant ingredient in providing individualized consideration is making the followers feel welcome and supported. In this regard, leaders are active listeners and also try to address the areas of concern of each follower besides saluting the personal milestones and achievements of all. In most African American churches, this concept may be translated into community service, targeting different lines of need such as food provision, mentorship for the youth, or senior citizens' services. In so doing, leaders who exercise individualized consideration not only build a stronger community but also make

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[25] Nancy T. Ammerman, Jackson W. Wilkes, and C. Gene, *Jesus On Leadership: Discovering the Secrets of Servant Leadership* (London, UK: Lifeway Press, 1998), 177.

[26] James H. Evans, Jr., *We Have Been Believers: An African-American Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1992), 235.

[27] Dwight N. Hopkins, *Shoes That Fit Our Feet: Sources for a Constructive Black Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000), 47.

[28] Bass and Riggio, *Transformational Leadership,* 58.

sure that each person is prepared to contribute to the mission of the church.[29] Effective leaders always tend to help their followers grow as individuals, considering their individual needs and contributions. This is evident in African American churches through their mentoring programs, pastoral care, and community outreach initiatives.[30]

Individualized Consideration allows for a sense of belonging and empowerment, which may be especially important in faith-based organizations where members seek spiritual and emotional support.[31] Transformational leaders build stronger, more cohesive communities by investing in the personal development of congregants. For example, leadership development programs for youth and young adults can ensure the sustainability of the church's mission while fostering the next generation of leaders.

Melded together, the principles of transformational leadership and strategic planning create a dynamic framework for setting organizational goals. This framework includes defining the church's vision, mission, and objectives and identifying appropriate resources to accomplish such objectives. Transformational leaders inspire and enable congregants to align their aspirations with the church's mission.[32] For instance, leaders capable of expressing inspirational motivation may articulate a strategic vision to which the congregation relates and with which it may collectively buy into.[33] Conversely,

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[29] John M. Bryson, *Strategic Planning for Public and Nonprofit Organizations* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons, 2018), 78.

[30] Lincoln and Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience*, 93.

[31] Peter J. Paris, *The Social Teaching of the Black Church* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 1985), 147.

[32] Arthur Shriberg and David Shriberg, *Practicing Leadership Principles and Applications* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons, 2011), 112.

[33] Dudley, and William McKinney, *Studying Congregations* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1998), 17.

intellectual stimulation motivates congregants to creatively think about how the church can serve the needs within their community, fostering creative solutions and new initiatives. Case studies in churches like Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta further show how transformational leadership fuels strategic success, expanded outreach programs, and greater community impact because of Franklin.[34]

Transformational Leadership and Luke 14:28: The Parable of Counting the Costs

Transformational leadership, much inculcating vision, motivation, and long-term planning resonates deeply into the very roots of principles laid out in biblical teachings such as in Luke 14:28. Jesus gave the parable of counting costs to show the basis of careful planning and going into decisions not impulsively but soberly: "For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it?" (Lk. 14:28). This parable makes a point related to foresight, resource management, and commitment to the accomplishment of a set goal, which in itself forms the core of transformational leadership.

By using an exploration of the alignment between this parable and transformational leadership, we get to understand how faith-based leaders, particularly from African American churches, are able to integrate biblical wisdom within their practice[35]. Transformational leadership operates on a concept wherein the style starts with a vision, a clear and compelling vision of what a leader can articulate and inspire

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[34] Raphael Warnock, *A Way Out of No Way: The Power of Vision in Church Leadership* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2020), 49.

[35] Timothy Laniak, *Shepherds After My Own Heart: Pastoral Traditions and Leadership in the Bible* (Downers Grove IL: Intervarsity Press, 2006), 44.

commitment to, thereby aligning the followers toward shared goals.[36] Luke 14:28 captures this aspect of leadership in the requirement to envision the outcome before embarking on a journey or project. Jesus' call to "sit down first and count the cost" is tantamount to strategic foresight that transformational leaders will put into operation.

This foresight is important for African American church leaders, who often lead their congregations in efforts such as community development, education programs, or social justice advocacy. In these contexts, leaders must balance their spiritual mission with practical considerations, ensuring they have the resources, time, and commitment needed to fulfill their vision.[37] For instance, a pastor might dream of initiating a youth mentorship program but must first engage in careful planning, which considers funds, volunteers, and infrastructure to support such a project. The transformational leader, much like Jesus' builder, recognizes that without proper preparation, the efforts are likely to fail and have one of two devastating options: frustration or the loss of credibility for the leader.[38] Transformational leaders count the costs and create a collective sense of mission and responsibility by including their followers in the planning.

The second important component of transformational leadership, relevant to Luke 14:28, is the level of sacrifice and commitment. Jesus' teaching invokes a person to take the time to analyze their level of commitment before embarking on any project. Transformational leaders rally their followers to appreciate and make sacrifices for the greater achievement. This includes rallying material resources as well as motivating

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[36] Kwame Gilbert, *Transformational Leadership* (Maitland, FL: Xulon Press, 2012), 71.

[37] James Stalker, *Christian Psychology* (London, UK: Hodder and Stoughton, 1914), 48.

[38] Bass and Riggio, *Transformational Leadership,* 119.

people to give their time, energy, and talents. Many leaders, especially in the African American Church, often use the transformational model when facing daunting obstacles, as many take great time and commitment.[39] Leaders like Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. embraced that model by helping lead the community into personal and community-wide sacrifices during the struggle for Civil Rights.[40] Their ability to align their followers' commitment with the larger mission exemplifies how transformational leadership echoes the message of counting the costs before building the "tower" of social transformation. This principle, however, is still so relevant today whereby church leaders provide guidance to members on issues related to poverty, inequity in education, and health disparities.

The parable in Luke 14:28 also emphasizes resource stewardship and accountability, another critical characteristic of transformational leadership. Jesus' illustration in the case of a builder assessing whether he has "enough to finish it" is indicative of the leader's responsibility to allocate resources effectively and keep the project at a level that can be sustained. Management of resources in transformational leadership must be holistic, not limited to money or financial resources alone but must include human capital, organizational capacity, and spiritual energy. Resource stewardship is most critical in African American churches due to the historical and continuing struggle of limited financing and systemic disparities. Transformational leaders work within these limitations by inspiring innovation and optimizing the use of

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[39] T. D. Jakes Ministries, *Leadership Principles for Modern Churches* (Dallas, TX: T.D. Jakes Ministries, 2021), 92.

[40] Gilkes, *If It Wasn't for the Women*, 56.

available resources. For instance, leaders might utilize intellectual stimulation, another pillar of transformational leadership, to inspire congregants to find creative solutions that leverage technology to expand outreach or through partnerships with community organizations.[41]

Transformational leaders ensure that their goals are achievable and their congregations are not vulnerable by holding themselves and their teams responsible for the purposeful use of resources.[42] Transformational leadership also involves focused enfranchisement through a sense of ownership and shared responsibility. At this point, the parable of counting the costs reflects a rubric of success tied to collective participation and accountability. Jesus encourages leaders to involve the people in planning and to involve everybody in understanding the vision and their role in achieving it.[43]

In practice, the transformational leaders of African American churches give opportunities for the congregants to pay back to the mission through volunteering, mentoring, or giving financial support. They earn the confidence and cohesion of the followers by giving them an opportunity for some decision-making and valuing their ideas. This collaborative approach, as manifested in transformational leadership, is considered necessary to attain results that are sustainable, especially in community-based programs.[44]

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[41] Lincoln and Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience*, 39-55.

[42] Roger Gil, *Theory and Practice of Leadership* (London, UK: Sage Publication LTD, 2011), 85.

[43] Pinnock, *Flame of Love,* 36.

[44] Franklin H. West, *Social Justice and the Black Church: A Transformational Approach* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2019), 178.

Luke 14:28 reminds us of the underlying principles of transformational leadership, such as vision, strategic planning, commitment, resource stewardship, and empowerment. By "counting the cost," transformational leaders ensure that goals are not only ambitious but also achievable, inspiring their followers to collaborate toward a common cause. For African American church leaders, this parable gives them a biblical basis for navigating the complexities of modern ministry while remaining rooted in faith and accountability.[45]

As transformational leaders guide their congregations through spiritual, social, and economic upheaval, they must be wise to Luke 14:28's requirement, preparing themselves with what it takes to be successful and their communities for lasting influence. By putting these principles into practice within their leadership behaviors, they ensure that, like the chaste builder's tower, the missions stand resiliently and fulfilled.

Renewal Theology and Its Connection to Transformational Leadership

Renewal Theology, in emphasizing the work of the Holy Spirit to revitalize people, communities, and institutions, readily aligns with the concept of transformational leadership. Again, both frameworks have clear relations in bringing about meaningful change, the empowerment of people, and the shared vision for change/growth in transformation.[46] While Renewal Theology insists on spiritual renewal and the empowerment of believers to dynamism in living the faith, in transformational

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[45] Bass and Riggio, *Transformational Leadership*, 198.

[46] Stephen Hacker and Tammy Roberts, *Transformational Leadership: Creating Organizations of Meaning* (Milwaukee, WI: Quality Press, 2004), 19.

leadership, leaders were to inspire followership in motivating and inspiring their shared vision in personal and collective development.[47]

There are links that bind Renewal Theology with transformational leadership, especially in the area of vision emphasis: while Renewal Theology focuses on the renewal of the believer's relationship with God and their role in extending the Kingdom of God, the leader who is a transformational leader creates a vision to inspire followers to achieve lofty goals and surmount all odds. In faith-based settings, such as African American Churches, leaders often use the principles of Renewal Theology to motivate congregants toward spiritual growth and social action. By connecting the church's mission with the work of the Holy Spirit, leaders encourage congregants to see their participation as a divine calling.[48]

Another parallel involves the matter of empowerment: the theology of renewal emphasizes a Holy Spirit-enabled endowment of believers with spiritual gifts and the practice of gifts through serving one another, and leaders with this transformational kind of leadership style give way to empowering individuals-through creating an atmosphere where intellectual stimulations and personal growth are inspired and valued. A pastor might apply Renewal Theology in leadership training, for example, by focusing on prayer and spiritual discernment dependence on the Holy Spirit to make sure followers are not just practically equipped but spiritually equipped to lead and serve.[49]

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[47] Grudem, *Systematic Theology,* 122.

[48] Barna Group, *Trends in Church Growth and Membership Retention* (Ventura, CA: Barna Group, 2020), 4.

[49] Pinnock, *Flame of Love,* 112.

Finally, Theology and transformational leadership proudly share in their commitment to holistic transformation. While much of Theology is devoted to spiritual dimensions in the lives of individuals, the theory also encompasses personal, emotive, and social renewal. Many church-based transformational leaders incorporate Renewal Theology into their practice by emphasizing spiritual practices such as communal prayer and worship while simultaneously attending to concrete needs related to things like education, social justice, and economic empowerment.[50] This dual focus ensures that transformation is comprehensive and impactful. In other words, Renewal Theology and transformational leadership are related in that both incorporate vision, empowerment, and holistic change. A transformational leader, therefore, may use the input of Renewal Theology to lead followers in a faith-based environment toward spiritual fulfillment and to serve others with purposeful engagement.

A Legacy of Transformational Leadership

Dr. John Malcus Ellison's tenure at Virginia Union University expresses the real meaning of transformational leadership. His vision for the School of Religion, commitment to academic excellence, and commitment to social justice created a platform on which the university could position itself as a leader in theological education and community empowerment. Ellison's contribution not only developed VUU's mission but also played a role in the further course of the struggle for equality and justice in the United States.

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[50] Lincoln and Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience*, 194.

The historical relevance of Ellison's leadership lies in his ability to inspire and equip others for meaningful change. As he fostered a culture of innovation and collaboration, the assurance was that the School of Religion was to continue being one of the shining lights in theological education and, at the same time, an influence for social betterment. His life stands in continuing testimony to the potential transformative power of education and leadership before the great challenges of humankind.

Of the sure signs of his stewardship is innovative theological education. It took for him a strong understanding of African American churches' concerns and representative spiritual leadership at home that cultivated critical minds toward societal and human systems for change to design Ellison's response. Indeed, in pursuit of his vision for comprehensive theological training at the School, Ellison proposed an intensive curriculum reform that included newly developed fields of study such as Social Ethics, Pastoral Care, and Community Involvement within his School of Religion.

This educational, transformational vision is further supported by the faculty Ellison attracts to the university. Clearly, he seeks scholars who are not only the best in their fields but also embrace the university's mission in service and advocacy. In this way, students in the School of Religion would receive an education that holistically prepares them to attend to the spiritual and material needs of their constituent congregations and communities. One notable achievement of Ellison was establishing linkages between the School of Religion and churches, civic organizations, and national theological associations. These accorded students with added educational experiences and placed the School of Religion at the forefront of theological education among African Americans. In fact, evidence of the effects of such programs remains relevant even today because the

graduates of the class have gone on to serve in better positions within the church, academia, and public service.[51]

With his work, Dr. John Malcus Ellison left behind a legacy of transformational leadership and an enduring vision for Virginia Union University and its School of Religion. In academic and spiritual excellence, Ellison was sure not to escape shaping the future of the university and several other individuals whom he equipped to lead integrational and purposeful lives. His legacy continues to inspire and challenge us to use education as a tool for building a more just and equitable society.

Conclusion

Transformational leadership has been and might continue to be a very strong framework through which African American churches face their peculiar challenges. Idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration are some of the principles that, if possessed by the leader, will, inspire the congregation to realize shared goals hand in hand with personal or spiritual growth. When combined with strategic planning, this leadership helps African American churches meet the challenges of modern ministry and maintain their traditional role as beacons of survival and agents of change. As these churches continue to grow and evolve, incorporating transformational leadership into their strategic frameworks will ensure their sustainability and relevance for future generations.

The synergy between transformational leadership and strategic planning holds the key to African American churches playing their dual role as spiritual havens and agents of

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[51] Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference, “Information,” SDP Conference, https://sdpconference.info.

social change. Through transformational leaders, congregants are empowered through the strategic process in developing a sense of ownership and collective responsibility in this approach. This will further bolster the church's ability to institute programs that meet community needs, ranging from social justice to economic empowerment programs.[52]

The biblical parable of counting the cost, as reflected in Luke 14:28, provides relevance to this transformational leadership in terms of planning and stewarding the resources. This is where African American church leaders can lead their congregations toward sustainable and impactful outcomes, taking into consideration their commitments and resources. Such alignment of spiritual wisdom to practical strategy reflects the holistic approach required in navigating the challenges of modern ministry.

In continued development and growth, it will be particularly important for African American churches to incorporate both transformational leadership and strategic planning. These institutions should be innovative yet linked with their spiritual and cultural heritage as they meet modern-day challenges, inspire their congregations, and expand their influence beyond the church doors. Transformational leadership will enable leaders to conceptualize a better future and organize their congregants to realize this future. Along with strategic planning, it positions the African American Church to face uncertainties with confidence and direction. These approaches together will continue to make these institutions resilient beacons of hope, justice, and community empowerment for years to come.

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[52] Pew Research Center, *The Role of Technology in Church Engagement Post-COVID-19* (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, 2021), 4.

CHAPTER SIX

PROJECT ANALYSIS

Introduction

This project aimed to explore strategies for building leadership capacity within First Mt. Olive Baptist Church to enhance member engagement and support the church's strategic planning process. The initiative was developed in response to challenges arising from a decline in active membership and diminished membership buy-in, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the church's relocation over eight miles from its previous site. These factors necessitated a re-engagement strategy to revitalize the congregation. The project proposed an organizational development intervention grounded in the transformational leadership model to address this. This approach emphasized inspiring change and fostering the growth of individual leaders and the wider church community to cultivate an active, purposeful, and meaningful congregation.

The central research question investigated whether a structured six-week leadership awareness training based on transformational leadership principles could enhance participants' spirituality, ministry involvement, and personal leadership capabilities. The training incorporated key elements of transformational leadership, including inspirational motivation, individualized consideration, discipleship, and idealized influence. It was designed to reignite leaders' passion and commitment to their faith and to equip them with the skills needed to engage members effectively, understand their needs, and support

the church's future growth. Through this intervention, the project sought to empower leaders to reverse the downward trend in membership and foster a thriving, spiritually engaged congregation.

The sessions in this training were designed to prepare participants for deeper discipleship, foster spiritual maturity, and better equip them to meet the needs of the congregation's members. The project emphasized developing a deeper understanding of oneself, navigating the church's evolving post-COVID environment, and understanding its members' diverse backgrounds and experiences.

The analysis presented in this chapter draws on data collected through pre- and post-surveys, interviews, and weekly reflective journals maintained by participants throughout the course. These methods were intentionally selected to provide both quantitative and qualitative insights into the effectiveness of transformational leadership training. Specifically, the data measures the program's impact on participants' self-awareness, spiritual growth, ability to identify congregational needs, and their own communication skills. The individual interviews complement the survey data by offering qualitative narratives of participants' personal growth, perceptions of their leadership abilities, and reflections on their spiritual journey. The weekly journals further capture detailed accounts of the participant's leadership progression and experiences over the course of the training.

This analysis focuses on several key areas, including the level of spiritual transformation achieved, changes in participants' understanding of transformational leadership, increased self-awareness, awareness of congregational needs, and improved communication with church members. The findings of this chapter aim to provide a

comprehensive evaluation of the project's outcomes and offer First Mt. Olive Baptist Church valuable insights into its future leadership development, spiritual health, and evolving congregational needs.

Overview of Data Collection Methods

The data collection process was designed to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the project's outcomes. To assess spiritual growth, ministry involvement, and leadership qualities among participants, a combination of spiritual, quantitative, and qualitative methods was employed. A mixed-methods approach was deemed ideal for this study as it enhanced the credibility of the findings by integrating statistical trends and subjective human experiences derived from the training.

Data Collection Instruments

Several instruments were utilized in the study, including pre- and post-surveys, semi-structured interviews, and reflective journals. Each tool played a specific role in capturing various dimensions of the participants' experiences during the transformational leadership course.

Pre-Surveys

At the beginning of the six-week intervention, all participants were administered pre-surveys. These surveys consisted of scaled questions designed to measure participants' initial levels of leadership aspiration, training in engaging church members, and understanding of the relationship between spiritual growth and ministry wellness.

The pre-survey data provided a baseline for measuring changes and outcomes, which was particularly important for assessing the intervention's impact.

Post-Surveys

Upon completing the training program, participants were required to complete post-surveys that mirrored the structure of the pre-surveys. This facilitated a straightforward comparison of participants' spiritual engagement and ministry activity levels before and after the intervention. Additionally, the post-surveys included questions inviting participants to reflect on their personal testimonials, spiritual growth, and the transformational impact of the course on their individual development and ministry practices.

Semi-Structured Interviews

In addition to the quantitative data collected through surveys, semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants at the conclusion of the training. These interviews offered a more personal and in-depth account of the participants 'experiences, focusing on the course's transformative and challenging aspects. The open-ended nature of the questions encouraged participants to articulate their perceptions, emotions, and experiences related to changes in their spirituality, leadership skills, and church involvement. This qualitative data was instrumental in identifying individual narratives and patterns of transformation.

Reflective Journals

Throughout the six-week program, participants were encouraged to maintain reflective journals. After each session, these journals documented their impressions, emotions, and religious or spiritual experiences. The qualitative data derived from these journals provided a week-by-week account of participants' spiritual journeys. The journals revealed cognitive and emotional learning processes and how participants applied transformational leadership principles in their daily lives. Recurring themes included changes in faith, ministry practices, and the integration of leadership principles.

Broader Assessment of Project Outcomes

The combination of these data collection techniques facilitated a holistic evaluation of the project's outcomes. The pre- and post-surveys provided quantitative insights into changes in engagement and satisfaction, while the interviews and journals offered qualitative perspectives on participants' personal and spiritual transformations. Together, these methods enabled a thorough assessment of the transformational leadership program's impact and the extent of spiritual renewal within the congregation.

Pre-Survey Findings

The preliminary findings gathered before the survey was conducted offered valuable insights into participants' leadership capabilities and understanding of the relationship between spiritual growth and wellness. This baseline data was crucial as it established a foundational context, enabling an assessment of the congregation's initial

levels of spiritual complacency and identifying key areas of focus for the transformational leadership intervention.

The survey data reveals encouraging trends regarding leadership readiness and training among participants. A significant majority expressed a strong desire to lead, with 41.2% rating their motivation at level four and 35.3% at level five. Only a small minority (5.9%) indicated minimal desire. This suggests a group that is largely inclined toward leadership roles is motivated to take on responsibilities. Similarly, confidence in the ability to serve as transformational leaders is high, with 47.1% rating themselves at level four and 35.3% at level five. These figures indicate that most participants view themselves as capable of inspiring and leading change, although a small portion (17.7%) express room for growth in this area.

When it comes to engaging members and surveying their needs, many participants feel well-prepared, with 35.3% rating their training at level five and another 29.4% at level four. However, a notable portion (29.4%) rated themselves at level three, suggesting moderate confidence, while one individual rated their training as minimal (level 1). Similarly, the data on training for developing action-planning steps reflects a mix of confidence levels. The majority (52.9%) rated their preparation at level four, while smaller groups rated themselves at levels three and five (17.6% each). A minority (11.8%) indicated lower confidence by rating their training at level. These results indicate areas for targeted improvement, particularly in action planning and engagement training, to ensure all participants feel equipped for leadership tasks.

Overall, the group demonstrates substantial strengths, particularly in their desire to lead and their confidence in their transformational potential. However, some gaps in

training and preparedness remain, particularly in engaging members and translating goals into actionable steps. To address these needs, leadership development workshops could help participants enhance their transformational skills and refine their strategic planning capabilities.

The pre-surveys also sought to determine participants' self-interest in the transformational leadership course. Some respondents stated that they wanted to find a new meaning in their religious practice and supposedly expected to obtain that in the course. One participant said, “I wish to become more involved, but I don’t know how to begin. I am hopeful that this course will assist me in identifying my posture within the church and how I can contribute.”

Methodology

This project aimed to assess the impact of transformational leadership on fostering spiritual self-awareness within the First Mt. Olive Church. It adopted a concurrent triangulation design, integrating quantitative and qualitative data collection methods to obtain comprehensive and nuanced insights into the participant’s spiritual growth and ministry engagement. Through this methodological framework, the study captured the intervention’s qualitative and quantitative impacts on individual participants and the broader church community.

Research Design

The central intervention for this study was a six-week transformational leadership course. Each week, participants engaged in structured sessions that addressed key

elements of transformational leadership, including *Introduction to Christian Discipleship and Wellness*, *Envisioning Future Needs*, *Facilitation Skills Training*, and *Action Planning and Implementation*. These sessions aimed to bridge the gap between leadership and congregation members, encouraging participants to take on greater responsibilities, develop spiritually centered leadership qualities, and commit themselves more fully to the church's ministry.

The study used quantitative methods, including pre- and post-surveys assessing quantitative changes in participants' spiritual activity and engagement in ministries, face-to-face interviews to gain qualitative information regarding participants' experiences, and weekly journals to monitor participants' experiences[1]. This method of data collection allowed for the capture of changes over time and, therefore, provided both a baseline and a detailed description of the participant's progress through the training.

Participant Selection

The participants in this research study were carefully selected from the leadership team at First Mt. Olive Baptist Church. Ten individuals were strategically and randomly chosen to ensure representation across diverse age groups and tenure within the church. This study targeted insights from three distinct categories of leadership: seasoned leaders with extensive years of service, younger leaders with less than five years of ministry experience, and newly appointed leaders serving for less than one year.

[1] John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches* (London, UK: Sage Publications, 1994), 78.

Incorporating participants with varied backgrounds in terms of gender, age, and levels of church involvement was critical for obtaining a comprehensive range of perspectives on spiritual engagement and leadership. This diversity allowed for an evaluation of how individuals at different leadership and spiritual development stages responded to transformational leadership training. Furthermore, it enabled an analysis of how varying levels of pre-existing spiritual participation influenced the program's outcomes.

Participants were recruited through targeted invitations and email announcements. Each prospective participant received detailed information about the study's purpose, scope, and time commitments required for the training. To ensure transparency and ethical integrity, informed consent was obtained from all participants. They were assured that their responses and reflections would remain confidential and were explicitly informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any point without penalty.

Data Collection Methods

The study's data collection process was organized into three distinct phases: pre-intervention, intervention, and post-intervention. Each phase employed tailored methods and tools to collect data, which were subsequently analyzed to assess the effectiveness of the transformational leadership initiative.

Pre-Intervention Data Collection - Pre-Surveys

Before the transformational leadership training commences, participants completed a comprehensive pre-survey designed to document their baseline levels of spiritual

involvement and ministry engagement. The survey included a combination of Likert-scale items and open-ended questions to facilitate the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data.

The Likert-scale items assessed participants' satisfaction with their personal spiritual growth, perceptions of church leadership, and alignment with the church's overarching vision. These items also evaluated levels of spiritual apathy and participants' readiness to assume leadership roles. Open-ended questions allowed participants to provide more detailed reflections, encouraging them to identify challenges they had encountered in ministry and areas where they sought growth. This initial data set served as a baseline for measuring the transformational effects of the training.

During Intervention - Weekly Reflective Journals

Throughout the six-week training program, participants were encouraged to maintain reflective journals documenting their thoughts, emotions, and spiritual insights following each session. These journals served as a primary source of qualitative data, offering continuous and dynamic accounts of how participants internalized and applied the principles of transformational leadership within their specific contexts.

Each weekly session explored a distinct aspect of transformational leadership, such as trust, obedience, faith, perseverance, and spiritual leadership. Participants were prompted to reflect on how these principles resonated with their personal experiences within the church and their broader spiritual journeys. Their reflections often illuminated areas of growth, such as increased confidence in leadership, renewed spiritual vitality, and alignment with ministry objectives.

The journals also revealed practical challenges faced by participants, including time constraints, self-doubt regarding leadership abilities, and difficulties in applying course concepts to their unique contexts. This iterative documentation enabled the study to track participants' spiritual and leadership development over time, offering valuable insights into the program's transformative impact. By integrating pre-surveys with reflective journaling, the study captured quantitative metrics of change and rich qualitative narratives revealing participants' evolving spiritual identities and leadership competencies.

Session Observations

In addition to the journals, the course facilitator made informal observations in each of the meetings and interviewed the participants, focusing on their level of engagement, group dynamics, and any positive or negative behavioral changes or attitude shifts over the course of six weeks. All these observations served as qualitative support in analyzing the issues arising from the journals and surveys regarding the participants' development.

Post-Intervention Data Collection - Post-Surveys

At the conclusion of the six-month transformational leadership course, participants completed a post-survey that mirrored the pre-survey conducted at the study's outset. This survey was designed to collect data on the participants' activities, ministry engagement, and perceptions of church leadership. Using a combination of Likert scales

and open-ended questions, the post-survey enabled a direct comparison with baseline data to evaluate changes over the course of the intervention.

While the quantitative results from the post-survey provided clear, measurable insights into the outcomes of the program, the qualitative responses illuminated participants' personal experiences and reflections. These complementary datasets allowed the study to comprehensively evaluate whether the course objectives—fostering spiritual renewal and leadership development—had been successfully achieved.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Following the administration of the post-survey, a series of semi-structured interviews was conducted to delve deeper into participants' experiences. These interviews served as a platform for participants to articulate their spiritual transformations, challenges, and achievements throughout the course.

The interview questions were intentionally open-ended, encouraging participants to discuss the changes they observed in their leadership abilities, their application of course principles, and any difficulties they encountered while implementing these skills. Additionally, participants reflected on how the course influenced their understanding of transformational leadership and its role within the church context. Feedback on the course structure, content, and delivery was also solicited, providing valuable insights for refining future iterations of the program. These interviews enriched the data and empowered participants to share their perspectives in their own voices.

Data Analysis

The study employed a dual approach to data analysis, combining quantitative and qualitative methods to ensure a robust evaluation of the course's impact. Descriptive statistical techniques were applied to the pre- and post-survey data, measuring changes in participants' spirituality, ministry participation, and satisfaction with their spiritual development. These quantitative insights highlighted the program's effectiveness in achieving its measurable goals.

Simultaneously, qualitative data from open-ended survey responses, interviews, and reflective journals underwent thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and narratives. Key themes that emerged included enhanced confidence in leadership, a rediscovery of spiritual purpose, and challenges in balancing ministry responsibilities with personal commitments. This qualitative analysis provided a deeper understanding of participants 'experiences, capturing the emotional and perceptual transformations that extended beyond numerical measures.

The study integrated quantitative metrics with qualitative narratives to assess the impact of the transformational leadership course. While pre- and post-surveys provided measurable outcomes, qualitative data from journals and interviews enriched the findings by contextualizing participant journeys and highlighting the broader implications of their growth.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical integrity was a cornerstone of this study. Participants were thoroughly informed about the study's purpose, scope, and objectives, and explicit consent was

obtained before their involvement. Measures were taken to ensure confidentiality, with all surveys, interviews, and journal entries anonymized to protect participants' entities. Additionally, participants were assured of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty, fostering an environment of transparency and trust throughout the research process. This ethical framework ensured that participants felt respected and secure, enabling them to engage fully and honestly with the study.

Implementation

The steps taken to institute six-week transformational leadership training in the church were well coordinated to shorten the communication gap between the leadership and membership of First Mt. Olive Baptist Church. Every week, the training centered on a particular theme of transformational leadership, an area of communication or self-reflection, or ways to assess the ministry's needs. This section outlines how the program was implemented over the six-week period; it includes a week-by-week breakdown of what was taught and done and the level of participation.

Week One: Introduction to Discipleship and Wellness

In the first week of the course, and in the first week of this project, we discussed Christian discipleship. We examined the Bible, prayer, community, and fellowship, as well as service and witnessing.

Session Structure

The session started with participants taking the pre-surveys. The surveys gave us a comprehensive look to see where the gaps and understanding of transformational leadership relate to Christian discipleship and wellness.

During the second part of this session, we discussed the foundations of Christian discipleship. We opened with an exercise asking all participants what they defined as discipleship. We also examined what the cypress ship looks like pre-pandemic versus post-pandemic. One of the critical areas we discussed was in-person participation in church and ministry activities. Because this is a traditional Baptist Church, most participants agreed that being a good disciple equals being visible inside the church on Sunday. We looked at the pivot and how discipleship not only needs to be viewed but also needs to be discussed and implemented in church post-COVID.

At the end of the session, participants were required to write down their thoughts in journals. The focus of these thoughts was perceptions of membership, especially those who potentially do not view discipleship the same way they do. The journaling also supported participants' understanding of younger generations.

Challenges

One of the biggest challenges of the session was for all participants to feel that this was a “safe space.” For this reason, the facilitator decided to walk through trust exercises and also create norms for the room so that everyone felt valued and understood and knew that this was a space where they could express their true feelings about their personal values, their personal walk with Grace, and the perceptions of others.

Week Two: Understanding Your Role as a Transformational Leader

In the second week of the class, we discussed the components of transformational leadership as they relate to ministry. Throughout the session, Dr. Sharon Sauls talked about inspiring people. She discussed four components that can be used as a catalyst to promote the inspiration of others while also building oneself as a transformational leader.

Session Structure

exploration of transformation leadership. The first component was an exploration of transformational leadership to inspire people, which was intellectual stimulation or intentional leadership. The key to this point was to ensure that we were strategic in how we communicated with others as we led them. The second component was individualized consideration or being empathetic. The trainer went through exercises for the participants to understand that their views of people differ from what others might feel. The third component of inspiring people was to be an inspirational motivation or being encouraging to others Dr. Sharon described in detail how being encouraging is being also transformational and your leadership. We talked about how hard it is sometimes to be encouraging to others when oftentimes you do not feel encouraged yourself. The last and final thought was being an example. In transformational leadership, it is important to talk to talk and walk the walk. This was a pivotal point for all participants, for we described how Jesus was our first and true example of this.

The ten-minute general session of journal writing focused on our self-assessment of being intentional, being empathetic, being encouraging, and being an example. Dr.

Sharon encouraged all to use this as a moment of self-reflection and see how we all can grow and be the best transformational leader possible.

Participant Response

Participants throughout the course of the session were extremely engaged. The majority of the participants shared that, though they wanted to be transformational leaders, they felt that they were hindered based on the environment and culture of the ministry. This was different from the minority of participants who had been at the church less than three years, who felt like they were already walking in a transformational leadership perspective. Seeing the responses of all participants also encouraged the senior leader to ensure that everyone felt that they could be transformational leaders.

Challenges

A few participants described how the senior leader had favorites throughout the session. These people can treat everyone and anyone how they choose to, which means they could be very disrespectful and unsupportive of fellow leaders and members. True transformation can only be halfway. This challenge was the first time that the majority of leaders were able to address the undertones of how some people were treated.

Week Three: Assessing Current Ministry Needs

During the third week, we discussed each ministry's success and challenges. We conducted a SWOT analysis of each ministry and group of ministries and discussed how things function and what needs to change in an open setting. The goal of this session was

to have an open dialogue and to have a true conversation about how ministry is really going inside a safe space.

Session Structure

During this session, the goal was to equip leaders with tools to access the current needs of the ministry. We gave each leader three to four ministries to describe their strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. We ensured that each person assessed ministries they were not a part of for fidelity and their analysis of the ministry. In their analysis, they were instructed to look at the ministry's leadership, participation, and impact. Each person was given the right to define the impact based on each ministry's influence and success through events and Sunday morning services.

The effective data analysis techniques to evaluate the ministry was used to ensure that we were able to collect equitable data for each ministry. We also discussed ways to evaluate ministry in the future in an effective way. Some of those ways included quarterly evaluation meetings in addition to self-evaluation after each event and activity. Doing so, will ensure that ministries can pivot and change throughout the course of a year versus waiting until the end of a given time to change, which could be a whole year from once they first noticed an issue.

Journal time for this week included a time of reflection for each participant to list in their journals what major stumbling blocks were preventing effective ministry from going forward. Throughout this time, participants could list key areas such as unaffected communication, last-minute planning, and lack of engagement as some of the main major themes that came from this time of journaling.

Participant Response

This particular session evoked many emotions in most participants. Some were excited to finally be able to give critical feedback on ministry operations and functions that they had previously been unable to communicate due to their fear of the ministry leadership taking things personally. This “Come to Jesus” meeting was overdue and needed to provide space for leaders to discuss how ministries can improve. Many participants said that this session was therapeutic and essential for the ministry to move forward.

Challenges

One of the major challenges of this week was that participants could not clearly see or say the ministry's success because they were involved in it. Because of that, they took personal feelings as to whether a ministry was successful or not. This often times are larger churches or ministries that might be larger number, but small and active participants. Once we got past people taking things personally this training went through.

Week Four: Envisioning Future Church Needs

The fourth week's topic was envisioning the church's future needs. Throughout the course of this session, we took the perspective of leadership within the church. We pushed leaders to see what the church needed in its local building and community with its memberships to be successful in the future. We first looked at the needs of the church in 2019 versus now. I then challenged the participants to examine their personal needs and how they changed before and after the pandemic. Using that same mindset, we looked at

what the church was focused on before the pandemic happened and what the church is focusing on after the pandemic happened. We want to first see from a baseline perspective if we were meeting the needs of the leadership before we move to meet the needs of the current membership.

Session Structure

This session focused on exploring visionary leadership principles within the ministry context. Throughout it, we examined the concept of prediction versus reality. We studied how, as leaders, we need to consider spiritual and natural perspectives to predict the needs of the local church. We then applied the same concept to individuals, looking at the needs of their local households.

During the ending part of the session, we took leaders through an exercise to see what they view the needs of the local church to be now and in the future. We first looked at the financial needs of the local community in addition to where the church is right now. After that, we looked at what some of them had heard from the membership prior to the session as to what they needed the church to be post-pandemic. We compiled those things into a master list of things to examine in the future as we plan to create a strategic plan for the church. Throughout the session, we encourage creative thinking through every process.

During this journal time, we encouraged each participant to assess the church's needs and or the needs that they heard the membership wanted the church to fulfill in their lives, the communities, and the city.

Participant Response

Throughout this session, many of the participants were challenged to examine what constitutes an actual need versus a want. Many can only see some possible needs but cannot describe the needs that the church must fulfill. Many described this meeting as superficial rather than functional needs for members, such as mental, health, and community needs.

Challenges

The majority of the participants have not been encouraged to ask each other questions or to examine the needs of their own households. Many admitted to living in survival mode since the pandemic occurred. We now realize that we must shift from that mode into a planned, strategic perspective.

Week Five: Round-Table Workshop Facilitation

The fifth week focused on effective listening for leaders. Dr. Tracy Hunt led a session titled “Managing Your Senses.” Throughout the session, she gave many tips for understanding how all your senses react to others.

Session Structure

The facility started the session with self-reflection. She wanted all the participants to ensure that they were properly able to see their self-worth and other things that could inhibit them from seeing others based on their own biases, experiences, and what they had previously been exposed to. Clinical skills were also reviewed as they relate to

understanding body behavior when communicating with others and when conversations create emotions for others.

The facilitator had the participants role-play by talking with each other, assessing their personal needs, and examining how those needs could be translated to the church. Throughout this time, each person reflected on what roadblocks prevented them from understanding others.

The facilitator challenged all participants to reflect on and list previous experiences in church and other life experiences that could possibly prohibit them from effectively communicating with membership. She also challenged them to use this particular entry when they go to personal therapy and to speak with the pastor and other key leaders about how they can be better church leaders.

Participant Response

The participants were extremely engaged in this session. There was a lot of self-healing in the midst of the session and role-play. After the role-play, the majority of participants really were engaged in the self-reflection in the journal entries and also collaborating with others in the room.

Challenges

Many face challenges by learning to lead while also bleeding. Throughout this session, many leaders did not realize that their past traumas were influencing their leadership styles. Most participants also noted that their communication styles varied greatly, resulting in inconsistency within the membership.

Week Six: Action Planning and Implementation

The last week of the course is devoted to action planning and implementing the data that they received from the local membership. Throughout this session, we examined potential themes of needs among the church's local membership.

Session Structure

During part of this session, the participants were able to list some common needs that many of the members discussed and disclosed to them. They then created charts and diagrams to see the common threads of needs and potential areas where the church could meet them. Additionally, this was the area where leaders were also able to identify potential ministries that could either currently meet these needs or in the future meet them.

Participants discussed evaluation methods such as surveys and self-reflection to ensure that they were meeting members' needs on a regular basis. A participant suggested using surveys with members yearly to ensure that we meet their needs. All participants took the post-assessment survey for the entire course. The survey included twenty minutes of discussion regarding each participant's progression within the training.

Participant Response

The last lecture proved to be very successful. All participants gained a lot of knowledge about identifying the needs of the local church and ensuring that they were building relationships with the membership as well.

Challenges

Some of the concerns regarding the meters that arose during the session focused on the difficulty of understanding what the members needed, even when they did not express it verbally. Interpreting needs based on conversations proved to be a challenge for many participants. Most of those who struggle admit that their struggle stems from a lack of experience directly communicating with members about their needs related to the church and their personal circumstances as well.

Pre- and Post-Test Results

Pre- and post-test questionnaires were designed to evaluate participants' levels of spiritual awareness, leadership involvement, and satisfaction with the extent to which they experienced transformation following the six-week transformational leadership program. The surveys incorporated close-ended and open-ended questions to understand participants' experiences before and after the intervention comprehensively. The following sections highlight the findings from key questions in the pre- and post-surveys, focusing on observed changes in spiritual perception, ministry engagement, and leadership participation.

Today, do you have the desire to lead others? The pre- and post-test responses analysis highlights a positive shift in participants' leadership perception and confidence following the six-week leadership training program. In the pre-test, participants were asked about their desire to lead others, and out of seventeen responses, 76.5% rated their desire at a four or five, indicating moderate to strong motivation to lead. However, 5.9% expressed very low desire (rating of one). This initial data suggests that while many

participants entered the program with an existing interest in leadership, there was still room for growth.

In contrast, the post-test measured participants' belief in their ability to be transformational leaders, and the results reflect a notable increase in confidence. Out of nine responses, 88.8% rated themselves at a four or five, showing strong belief in their leadership potential. Only 11.1% rated themselves at a one, demonstrating that few participants doubted their abilities after the program. This represents a significant improvement, as fewer participants expressed uncertainty in their leadership capacity compared to the pre-test.

The findings indicate that the training successfully enhanced participants' confidence and self-perception as transformational leaders. While many began with a desire to lead, the post-test responses reveal that participants emerged from the program with a stronger belief in their ability to embody and practice transformational leadership. This positive transformation underscores the program's effectiveness in fostering leadership skills and empowering participants to embrace their potential as leaders.

Today, do you think you are or can be a transformational leader? The comparison between the pre-test and post-test results highlights a significant improvement in participants' belief in their ability to be transformational leaders. In the pre-test, where seventeen responses were recorded, 47.1% (eight participants) rated themselves at a four, and 35.3% (6 participants) rated themselves at a five, showing moderate to strong confidence. However, 5.9% (one participant) rated themselves at a two, and 11.8% (two participants) rated at three, indicating some uncertainty about their transformational leadership potential.

The post-test, with nine responses, revealed a notable shift toward higher confidence levels. A majority of participants, 88.8%, rated themselves at four or five, with 44.4% (four participants) choosing four and another 44.4% (four participants) selecting five. Only 11.1% (one participant) rated themselves at one, reflecting low confidence, but this is a reduction from the pre-test results, where multiple lower ratings were observed.

The findings demonstrate that the leadership training successfully increased participants' self-perception and confidence in their transformational leadership abilities. The decrease in lower scores and the consolidation of responses at four and five in the post-test reflect a clear improvement in participants' belief in their capacity to lead and inspire transformation. This shift underscores the effectiveness of the training program in enhancing leadership confidence.

On a scale from one to five, how trained are you to engage members to survey their needs of the church? The comparison between the pre-test and post-test results reveals a positive shift in participants' perceived training to engage church members in surveying their needs. In the pre-test, with seventeen responses, 35.3% (six participants) rated their training level at five, indicating strong confidence. In contrast, 29.4% (five participants) rated it at four and another 29.4% (five participants) at three. A small portion, 5.9% (one participant), rated themselves at one, showing minimal training confidence. These results suggest that prior to the training program, participants were moderately confident in their ability to engage church members, though there were notable gaps.

In the post-test, with nine responses, there was a slight upward trend in higher ratings. Three participants (33.3%) rated their training level at five, and another 33.3% (three participants) rated it at four, showing a consolidation of confidence in the higher categories. However, there was still a portion, 22.2% (two participants), rating themselves at three, and 11.1% (one participant) at one, reflecting lingering uncertainty for a few participants.

Overall, the post-test results demonstrate improvement and consistency in participants' training confidence, particularly with the majority rating themselves at four or five. The decrease in lower scores and the overall stability at higher levels indicate that the leadership training program enhanced participants' perceived skills in engaging church members effectively, although further support may still be needed for those who rated themselves lower.

On a scale of one to five today, how trained are you to develop action-planning steps for a given task? The analysis of the pre-test and post-test results reveals a noticeable improvement in participants' perceived training for developing action-planning steps for given tasks. In the pre-test, with seventeen responses, the majority, 52.9% (nine participants), rated themselves at four. In contrast, 17.6% (three participants) rated themselves at three and another 17.6% (three participants) at five, indicating moderate to strong confidence. However, 11.8% (two participants) rated their training level at two, suggesting lower confidence for some individuals.

In the post-test, with nine responses, the results show a shift toward higher confidence levels. Four participants (44.4%) rated themselves at four, and 33.3% (three participants) gave the highest rating of five, reflecting a consolidation of confidence in

the upper range. However, 11.1% (one participant) rated themselves at one, and another 11.1% (one participant) at three, showing that some participants still expressed lower levels of confidence. Despite this, the overall trend shows an increase in ratings of five, along with a decline in participants selecting lower scores, particularly at two.

Overall, the post-test results indicate growth in participants' perceived abilities to develop action-planning steps. The increase in high ratings (four and five) demonstrates the positive impact of the training, as more participants now feel well-equipped to handle task planning effectively. While some individuals may still require additional support, the overall shift toward greater confidence reflects the training program's success in enhancing action-planning skills.

On a scale of one to five today, how well do you understand the connection between your personal spiritual growth and wellness and ministry within the church*?* The comparison between the pre-test and post-test results demonstrates a shift in participants' understanding of the connection between personal spiritual growth and wellness in ministry within the church. In the pre-test, with seventeen responses, 35.3% (one participant) rated their understanding at four, and another 35.3% (six participants) gave the highest rating of five. Meanwhile, 23.5% (four participants) rated their understanding at three, and 5.9% (one participant) rated it as very low at one. These results suggest that, before the training, the majority of participants already had a moderate to strong understanding of the connection, though a small portion displayed minimal awareness.

A positive trend toward higher understanding was observed in the post-test, with nine responses. Four participants (44.4%) rated their understanding at five, reflecting the

strongest connection, while 22.2% (two participants) rated it at four, and another 22.2% (two participants) rated it at three. However, 11.1% (one participant) still rated their understanding at one, indicating limited improvement for a small segment. Despite this, the majority of responses consolidated in the upper range, particularly at five, reflecting an overall enhancement in participants' perception of the connection between their personal spiritual growth and ministry wellness.

In summary, the results highlight an improvement in participants 'understanding of this connection following the leadership training. While a small portion remains with limited progress, the overall trend shows growth, with a notable increase in participants rating their understanding at the highest level five. This indicates that the training was largely successful in fostering greater awareness of how personal spiritual growth contributes to effective ministry.

Journal Reflections

At the end of this six-week transformational leadership course, participants were called for their weekly self-reflection, which proved to be quite insightful into their spiritual development regarding leadership and engagement in ministry. In other words, members were to reflect upon each week's teaching and its relevance and application to them first as good Christians and with their church activities. These journals provided a rich source of qualitative data that gave insight into profound changes at existential and psychological levels, and changes in how participants conceptualized leadership, spirituality, and community engagement. The following analysis is derived from thematic content from the journal entries, the purpose of which is to determine how the course

shaped the participants' perception of leadership, spiritual development, and link to ministry.

Week One: From the Outside In: How Discipleship Can be Different for Others

Spiritual discipleship has often been viewed in the church from one specific lens: how it has been taught from generation to generation. The majority of participants reflected on how they learned spiritual discipleship and how it has changed over time. One shift that the majority of participants noted in their journal entries in a week was how people post-pandemic view Christian discipleship differently than those who might have been disciples before the pandemic. One of the major sticking points is visible participation in church before the pandemic. The majority of the participants saw participation as essential for discipleship. Now, a large majority of participants describe struggling with the idea that physical presence in church is optional. Many described different reasons why this was troubling to them. Two of the themes that stood out the most were family, legacy, and age. Older participants found a deeper struggle with younger members who saw visual presence as optional in church. That same demographic of participants also spoke to different levels of family, legacy in church, and why it is important for people to be visible.

Overall, all participants wrote about their personal struggles with understanding post-pandemic Christian discipleship. Though the majority of younger participants under the age of fifty describe understanding, learning, and appreciating post-pandemic discipleship, the older participants described sticking to their foundation of being present as part of their Christian walk.

Week Two: How Can I Grow as a Transformational Leader?

During the second week of the class, participants reflected on the different traits of transformational leadership that they needed to work on. These traits included being a better communicator, understanding others, and knowing their value. One theme found throughout 60% of the journal entries was reflections on using one's voice. Unfortunately, most of these participants found it troubling to use their own voices when making decisions and understanding the membership.

Week Three: Ministry Stagnation: Is It Me or the Ministry?

In the third week, participants reflected on how their personal perspectives and influence affect the ministry. This was when all participants got to see and examine the SWOT analysis of their ministry and also reflect upon what areas they need to grow as leaders so that their ministry can thrive. One of the key highlights that was found in the journal entries of those who had been leading ministries for more than five years was the thought that the ministry was not moving because of their own personal issues. The silver lining in this week's drawing entries was the identification of the issue and the fact that a majority of the participants found the things they needed to work on and understood and committed to working on those things.

Week Four: Am I Hearing You? Charting Needs of Others

Week four focuses on participants understanding the needs of others while shifting through needs they could not support. Many other participants in this week's journal reflected upon having conversations with members and not fully understanding

the needs they could support versus other needs they could not. Also, during this week, participants were able to list out possible needs that they have heard from members within the last seven days and see if there are any consistencies with others who might have heard or had the same conversations with memberships; this entry was a sobering reminder to many other participants on how they listen to members and what they interpret as to their needs and how the church can support them.

Week Five: Stumbling Blocks, Understanding What I Need to Work On

In week five, participants focused on their interpersonal deficiencies and areas of communication that they needed to work on to be effective transformational leaders. All participants were given a master list of communication styles and asked to identify which one they were. They journal the benefits of these communication styles while also taking note of the setbacks of these same communication styles. One common theme among participants who were older than the age of fifty was that there was little or nothing to work on. The inverse was found in those participants who were less than the age of fifty, who all noted different areas of their communication style that needed to be adjusted, removed, and or changed. One of the many areas that need to be discussed is the area of self-growth. All the participants noted different areas outside communication that they needed to work on to become better leaders.

Week Six: What Action Plans do I have for the Ministry? What are the Next Steps?

The theme of the final week of the training was regarding the next steps for the ministry. All participants, by this time, were able to identify areas of weakness and or

chains that need to be discussed, augmented, and shifted for the next year to meet the congregation's needs. All participants this week charted out different areas of chains and also the next steps that they need to take as leaders and steps that they need to support those with whom they are leading. One of the major takeaways from this journal entry was a large majority of participants halfway through journal time. Ask the question, what do we do next? This poses an opportunity for additional training on not only identifying issues but also charting out each step to resolving those identified issues.

Summary of Learning

The six-week transformational leadership course conducted at Mt. Olive Baptist Church exposed participants to spiritual, leadership, and ministerial engagement. Some of the biggest takeaways came from the pre- and post-test data. Comparing pre- and post-test results across all questions revealed significant improvements in participants' confidence, skills, and understanding following the leadership training program. Each question focused on a different aspect of leadership development, and the results collectively demonstrated the positive impact of the training on participants' perceptions of their leadership potential and abilities.

For the desire to lead others, pre-test results showed that 76.5% of participants rated themselves at four or five, reflecting moderate to strong interest. By the post-test, participants' confidence in being transformational leaders increased, with 88.8% rating themselves at four or five. This indicates a maintained desire and a strengthened belief in their capacity to lead effectively. A key shift occurred in belief in transformational leadership potential, where post-test results consolidated at the highest levels, reflecting

increased confidence as participants moved from a general desire to a clearer self-perception of their leadership capabilities.

When evaluating training to engage church members and survey their needs, the pre-test showed a balanced spread, with 35.3% rating themselves at five and 29.4% at three and four. Post-test results reflected modest growth, with 66.6% of participants rating themselves at four or five. While some participants still expressed uncertainty, the overall shift toward higher scores demonstrates enhanced confidence in engaging with others and identifying community needs.

The pre-test revealed that 52.9% rated themselves at four for developing action-planning steps, while only 17.6% felt confident enough to rate themselves at five. The post-test results showed a stronger consolidation at the higher levels, with 44.4% selecting four and 33.3% selecting five. Although some participants continued to rate themselves lower, the post-test results suggest a noticeable improvement in participants' planning skills and strategic thinking.

Finally, regarding understanding the connection between personal spiritual growth and wellness in ministry, the pre-test indicated that 70.6% of participants rated themselves at four or five, showing a moderate to strong understanding. Post-test results strengthened this awareness, as 44.4% selected five. This shift indicates that participants built on their pre-existing knowledge and deepened their understanding of how spiritual growth directly connects to effective ministry leadership.

Biggest Takeaways

The most significant takeaway from the results is the marked improvement in participants' self-confidence and abilities across all measured areas. The training effectively fostered greater confidence in leadership potential, engagement with others, and action-planning skills. This was most evident in the growing number of participants rating themselves at the highest levels (four and five) in the post-test, particularly regarding their belief in being transformational leaders and their understanding of spiritual growth's role in ministry wellness. While some participants still expressed lower confidence levels, the overall upward trends underscore the program's success in equipping participants with the tools and mindset necessary for transformational leadership. The combination of leadership skills, strategic planning, and spiritual growth highlights a holistic improvement, positioning participants to lead effectively within their ministry contexts.

In planning for ministry, many other participants were not fully aware of their own value or what they bring to the church. Throughout the course of this training, one of the major reflections that I had was that we do not utilize people to their full potential. We oftentimes pigeonhole people to what is comfortable for us. If we are going to continue to meet the needs of an ever-changing generation, we must be able to understand where people are to meet their needs while also growing them into the disciples that Jesus would have them to be so that they can meet the needs of others.

Many other participants reflected upon many years of volunteering in the church. While they all had various experiences within different ministries, denominations, and churches, one of the most unfortunate themes throughout most participants was they did

not understand or did not know the impact they had. I believe if we see the church thrive in the next year, we must not only do the church's work but understand its impact on its people. Strategic planning only goes as far as those who are working on the plan. True engagement must be had by all meaningful leaders and church members will see progression in the next year.

Another reflection that was taken from this training was the majority of participants did not fully understand the impact that they have on membership. In the African American church, we often put the weight of communicating and inspiring others onto that of the pastor. Throughout the course of this training, many participants stated that the vision was that of the pastor, and they were responsible for giving it to the membership. Only a handful of participants reflected upon the responsibility of reinforcing the vision with the membership. In order to truly be a transformational church, it starts with the leaders. Gone are the days when we could only rely on the pulpit to reinforce the church's vision.

Another reflection from the training was the lack of self-awareness from leaders as it relates to how they are perceived and how their actions impact others. Many leaders who participated in this training affirmed the question that they felt that they acted on an island and that most things they did not have an impact on the church at large. If we are going to be a church that impacts the world, we have to take the disciples' perspective. They each had their own duties and responsibilities, and they did what they were supposed to do: the work of Jesus Christ. In conclusion, the six-week course introduced transformational leadership as a key component to ensuring leaders understand member

and then members also understand the church's vision. Throughout this training, we effectively engaged those participant leaders, understood their call, and ministry.

Conclusion

The end-of-the-week transformational leadership training program in the Mt. Olive Baptist Church was a breakthrough for the participants and the entire church congregation. This assessment was based on the course objectives that aimed at closing the communication gap between membership and leadership for the sake of the Ford mobility of the church. This course, which was based on biblical and leadership principles, went far above expectations with its impact on all its participants. As reflected in the pre-and post-test, all the participants felt an increased need to lead while gaining an increased understanding of what transformational leadership really means. The participants finish the training understanding who they are as leaders and the post-pandemic church. It is obvious that with the skills and training that they receive that the participants now feel that they are better leaders and can better support the membership that they lead.

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